A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF JACQUES ELLUL'S CHRISTIAN ETHIC

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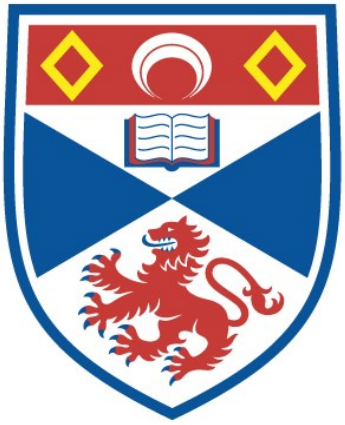

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by

Ronald R. Ray

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This work has attempted to interpret and to critically evaluate Jacques Ellul's Christian ethic by means of a direct examination of his theological and social writings. At particular points where he has shown dependence on various theological thinkers, their related writings have been studied. The various statements Ellul makes have also been biblically evaluated.

I was admitted as a Research Student under Ordinance 350 (General No. 12) on 1 January 1971 and have been accepted from that date as a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy under Resolution of the University Court, University of St. Andrews, 1967, No. 1.

I, Ronald R. Ray, declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that it is the expression of my own research, and that it has not previously been submitted in any application for a higher degree.

(Signed)

Candidate

I certify that Ronald R. Ray, B.A., M.Div., has spent ten terms of research under my supervision, that he has fulfilled the conditions of Ordinance No. 12 and the resolution of the University Court, 1967, No. 1, and that he is qualified to submit the following thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

(Signed)

Supervisor

TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

Acknowledgements i

Prefatory Notes ii

Biography iii

INTRODUCTION 1
Purpose 1
Problems and methods 2
The promise of Ellul's ethic 8

CHAPTER I: THE HUMAN CONDITION: BONDAGE 10
Sin 10
The fallen world 14
The sin of the city 20
The sins of the city 24
The biblical basis of Ellul's ontology of the city 26
Human morality 28
Dual morality: a qualification 35

CHAPTER II: FREEDOM AS CHRISTOCENTRIC EXISTENCE 42
Freedom as the receipt of grace 42
Freedom as life in Christ 48
Freedom as deliverance to the captives 55

CHAPTER III: FREEDOM AS ESCHATOLOGICAL EXISTENCE 61
The otherness of the Christian life 61
In the world but not of the world 66
The exegetical basis 70
Detachment from the world's values 72
Agonistic existence illustrated with reference to the city .. 77
Christian ends-means reasoning 83
Christian "styles of life" 88

CHAPTER IV: THE CONCRETENESS OF OBEDIENCE 94
God's commandment and biblical law 95
A rejection of the rational application of biblical codes and principles 97
Theocentric relativism 102
Casuistry and practical casuistry 103
The use of moral revelation from the past 105
The law as a lower limit 109
The law as instructional preparation 116
Evaluation 120

CHAPTER V: THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: FAITHFUL WITNESS TO JESUS CHRIST 126
The Christian's unique manner and purpose 126
Christian social witness 135
Freedom from preoccupation with results 159
Christian humility 174
Christian suffering 186
Christian love 193

CHAPTER VI: CHRIST'S LORDSHIP OVER A REBELLIOUS WORLD 209
Opposition to the sacralizing of history 209
A biblical evaluation 223
Christ's absolute sovereignty and freedom 231

page

The freedom of God and the independence of natural man 235
The apocalyptic problem 241

CHAPTER VII: THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE POLITICAL ORDER 250
The politization of the world and the Church 251
The relativity of the political order 261
The autonomous nature of politics and a Christian response .. 292
The inability of citizens to control the State or to effectively participate in politics 306
Some proposals concerning indirect political activity 310
Conclusion 316

CHAPTER VIII: THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MONEY 320
Mammon 320
Sociological confirmation 322
The relativizing of money 323
Christian stewardship 332
Evaluation 334

CHAPTER IX: THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE 338
Violence: an order of necessity 339
The laws of violence 343
Christian freedom from the violent order of necessity 354
Non-violence as based on uniquely Christian premises 356
The biblical basis 362
The refusal to use Christianity to justify violence 366
Critical issues 371

CHAPTER X: CONCLUSION 374
Ellul the prophetic Christian witness 374
Methodological remarks 375
Interpretative conclusions from previous chapters 379
Ch. I, The Human Condition: Bondage 379
Ch. II, Freedom as Christocentric Existence 384
Ch. III, Freedom as Eschatological Existence 386
Ch. IV, The Concreteness of Obedience 389
Ch. V, The Purpose of the Christian Life: Faithful Witness to Jesus Christ 394
Ch. VI, Christ's Lordship over a Rebellious World 399
Ch. VII, The Christian Life and the Political Order 402
Ch. VIII, The Christian Understanding of Money 410
Ch. IX, The Christian Understanding of Violence 422
The ingredients of Ellul's Christian ethic 417

APPENDIX: The Impossibility of a Christian Ethic 424

BIBLIOGRAPHY 428

SUBJECT INDEX 439

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R.R.R.

PREFATORY NOTES

This work has attempted to interpret and to critically evaluate Jacques Ellul's Christian ethic by means of a direct examination of his theological and social writings. At particular points where he has shown dependence on various theological thinkers, their related writings have been studied. The various statements Ellul makes have also been biblically evaluated.

In all cases scriptural quotations are taken from the Revised Standard Version, unless they appear as part of a quotation from Ellul or another author.

The many references abbreviated as "Barth I/1", "Barth IV/3", etc., apply to Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics and specifically to the edition published by T. & T. Clark (Edinburgh, 1936-1969) and edited by G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance.

BIOGRAPHY

Since Jacques Ellul's person and thought are inseparably interrelated, we begin with a brief biographical sketch.

Ellul was born in Bordeaux, France, on January 6, 1912. He writes, "I was not brought up in an especially Christian family, and had only a very remote knowledge of Christianity in my childhood."[1] He tells us that his family was quite poor and that he grew up amid the people of the docks of Bordeaux.[2] He began to earn his own living at the age of sixteen and continued to do so while completing his university studies.[3]

Ellul began his university studies at Bordeaux and graduated from the University of Paris in 1936 with the degree of Doctor of Laws. In his course of study he received degrees in history, sociology and law.[4] Later in his career he was to receive an honorary doctoral degree from the University of Amsterdam.

Ellul says that at the age of nineteen he happened to be reading Marx's Capital and became so enthusiastic about what he read that he began to devote a great deal of time to reading Marx's thought and soon

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1. Jacques Ellul et al., "From Jacques Ellul," Katallagete: Be Reconciled II, Nos. 3-4 (Winter/Spring 1970), p. 5.
2. Corresponding to Ellul's own life among the poor will be his concern to define the Church's role with reference to the poor, as well as his concern to help the Church to gain a true self-understanding concerning money.
3. Katallagete, p. 5.
4. Corresponding to Ellul's own formal training in three fields will be his almost Renaissance concern for a synthesis of knowledge transcending narrow technical ways of thought. He writes, "It seems as though the specialized application of all one's faculties in a particular area inhibits the consideration of things in general" (The Technological Society, p. 435).

became a "Marxist". However, he was disappointed with the Communists because they seemed to be so far from Marx, and hence he never joined the Party.[1] He tells us that at approximately the age of twenty-two "I was also reading the Bible, and it happened that I was converted — with a certain 'brutality'!"[2]

The great problem for Ellul then became whether it was possible to be both a Marxist and a Christian. On the philosophical plane he "quickly"[3] recognized the incompatibility; in choosing Jesus Christ, he abandoned Marxist philosophy. But he had learned more from Marx than philosophy; he had also learned a sociology, a radical way of looking at social, economic and political problems. This sociological method of interpretation was retained.[4]

In 1933, as a twenty-one-year-old student, Ellul participated with E. Mounier in the founding of the journal Esprit.[5] At the time he was,

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1. Katallagete, p. 5.

2. Ibid. The word "approximately" must be emphasized, for Ellul's conversion and his struggle between Christianity and Marxism was more complex than these statements indicate. In a letter to this writer, dated September 14, 1972, he said that his conversion to the Christian faith involved a struggle of five or six years, between the ages of nineteen and twenty-five (he thought that he first experienced the presence of God when he was approximately twenty years old, but at that time he did not truly believe in Christ, and continued to doubt and to refuse to obey God's will). Ellul was considering Christianity even at the time when he became attracted to Marxist thought, but as his Christian understanding grew he abandoned Marxist philosophy.

3. The word "quickly" is Ellul's own and in fact somewhat simplifies his actual experiences. If Ellul had a religious experience at approximately twenty-two years of age which led him to "quickly" abandon Marxism (Katallagete, p. 5), it is, nevertheless, the case that his nominal Christianity of the years from nineteen to twenty-two had not led him to do so.

4. Katallagete, p. 5. The precise meaning of Ellul's retention of Marxism as a sociological method is not entirely clear. He does not accept the notion that social ills stem basically from the fact that capital is not held by the proletariat. Perhaps what he means is that he, like Marx, has found a central theme by which he interprets other problems of modern life. He, unlike Marx, sees this central motif to be the rationalization of life under technological determinants — not the issue of class warfare to gain control of capital.

5. Katallagete, p. 5.

at least philosophically, a committed Marxist, but only an interested Christian. (He pointed out that though the journal represented the concerns of social Christianity, some non-Christians also participated. Ellul was apparently in between these two classifications.)[1] By 1937 his Christian beliefs had solidified and as a result he broke with Esprit in 1938. He took his way "all alone" because he was convinced that the Mounier circle was headed toward ordinary socialism and was superficial both theologically and sociologically.[2]

In 1935, as a twenty-three-year-old law student, Ellul wrote his first article on technique.[3] "Since 1935, I have been convinced that on the sociological plane, technique was by far the most important phenomenon, and that it was necessary to start from there to understand everything else."[4]

Upon graduation from the University of Paris in 1936 he was an assistant lecturer at Montpellier, Strasbourg, and Clermont-Ferrand. From 1936 to 1939 Ellul was also active in French politics. In 1940 his teaching appointment was revoked by the Vichy government. In the years from 1940 to 1944, along with such notables as Sartre and Camus, he was a leader of the French Resistance. During this time his own father was deported.

In 1944 after the liberation, Ellul became deputy mayor of Bordeaux and held that post until 1946, abandoning his political career in 1947.[5] Since 1946 he has been professor of the History and Sociology

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1. Letter, Sept. 14, 1972.
2. Katallagete, p. 5. Thus began Ellul's lifelong criticism of "social Christianity" for its theological and sociological superficiality. He will later accuse the World Council of Churches on this same count (Ellul, "Mirror of These Ten Years," The Christian Century LXXXVII, No. 7 (Feb. 18, 1970), p. 202).
3. Katallagete, p. 5.
4. Ibid.
5. He frankly admits that he became sceptical about politics after his political/...

of Institutions at the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences of the University of Bordeaux. Since 1947 he has also held a chair at the Institute of Political Studies.

In 1946 Ellul published Le Fondement Théologique du Droit. Though he had already written a major article on law in 1939 and though he had shared in the joint authorship of two books, this was his first major work. In this book Ellul related biblical and theological insights to the problem of understanding the meaning of human legal tradition. In 1948 he wrote Présence au Monde Moderne. He has said that he regards this work as his general introduction to all of his writings.[1] Indeed this work lays the sociological and theological foundations from which he will develop his later thought.

Over the years Ellul has been an active though critical churchman. From 1946 to 1953 he was a member of the Committee on Work of the World Council of Churches, and between 1953 and 1972 he was a member of the National Council of the Reformed Church of France.[2] In July 1969 he

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political experience as deputy mayor of Bordeaux. He then began to realize that any action we take in politics is small-scale, concerned only with details. Since ours is a global society, all political activity is interrelated. This meant to Ellul that even serious political action at the local level will be nullified or totally taken over by society and utilized in society's own ways ("Mirror," p. 203). His bitter experiences led him to the rejection of direct political activity and to the conclusion that democracy is in the process of being lost (The Political Illusion, p. 230). "These various crises have led me ... to withdraw more and more from politics ... I am convinced that any action we take ... in politics ... is utterly useless" ("Mirror," p. 203). The entire thesis of The Political Illusion can be read as a theoretical statement of Ellul's own political experience. What he came to realize in 1944-48 is precisely what he later states with utmost cynicism: "If indeed we seek a place to make our fine feelings and our humanism count, let us not participate in politics: it is no longer capable of absorbing human warmth" (Political Illusion, p. 94).

1. Letter, Jan. 2, 1972.

2. Some interpreters have concluded that Ellul has totally abandoned the organized Church (e.g. James Y. Holloway, Katallagete, p. 14; Stephen Rose, Katallagete, pp. 44-6; see below, p. 164(f.), n.4). As the following paragraph will indicate, he is greatly discouraged with the institutional/...

institutional Church and does not think that there is much hope that it can be renewed to any great extent. Thus he writes, "I am convinced that any action we can take ... at church reform is utterly useless" ("Mirror," p. 203). It does not follow, however, that such discouragement about the general renewability of the organized Church is for Ellul synonymous with a flat rejection of it. He tells us that though the Church is "bourgeois and unfaithful ... she is still the Church" (False Presence of the Kingdom, 1972, p. 35). He argues that institutional form and structure are essential for the Church's existence (False Presence, p. 35). Though Ellul is very critical of both the World Council of Churches and the Reformed Church of France, he most definitely has not withdrawn from the Church's worship, nor on his terms can one be a Christian alone (Letter, Jan. 2, 1972). However severe his criticisms of the organized Church, they are not spoken from the safe distance of institutional non-involvement. This is as we would expect from one who argues that the Christian life necessarily involves suffering and "agony", and that Christians should put themselves in situations where they have to struggle in opposition to the ways of the world (The Presence of the Kingdom, 1967, pp. 27-28). It seems that the most that can be said (and this is simply a deduction from what follows) is that Ellul is open to experimental forms of the Church, especially those of an informal and personal nature, but is not willing flatly to reject the present form of the Church. (On his terms, even new forms will necessitate a degree of organizational structure.)

Now we must be more specific as to the exact nature of Ellul's criticism of the organized Church. He is unhappy with the World Council of Churches for four reasons: (1) He thinks that it is on the way towards becoming a bureaucratic system which conforms to sociological laws of organization rather than obeying the Holy Spirit. (2) He thinks that theological differences are being dropped, because of indifference to theological truth, only to have a new political credo offered in their place (he believes that this new political creed will lead to even greater divisions). (3) It is his opinion that many of the social stands taken by the World Council of Churches are based on inadequate study of society and on inadequate theological study ("Mirror," p. 202): "The ethical consequences of the faith have not been examined with any theological depth, and the stupendous newness of our society — a newness that renders all older conceptions antiquated — has not been adequately analyzed" (Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective, 1969, p. 70). (Ellul's critique of the World Council of Churches came into the open at the Conference on Church and Society in 1966: "There I voiced my total dissent, because it seemed to me that the conference had not tackled any of the basic problems of our society, had simply affirmed purely demagogic theses (for example, those about the so-called underdeveloped countries), had proposed remedies some of which were in fact inapplicable, and had adopted a theology of revolution without taking theological thought at all" ("Mirror," p. 202).) (4) He believes that the Church must adopt a point of view at variance with society's, one which is based on faith in God as "Wholly Other". He thinks that the position of the World Council of Churches (as set forth in the four volumes on "Church and Society") involves a cultural Christianity, whereby the tension between the Church and the world is minimized (Ellul, "Between Chaos and Paralysis," The Christian Century LXXXV, No. 23 (June 15, 1968), pp. 749-750).

Ellul's/...

became the editor of the prestigious French Christian journal Foi et Vie.[1]

In attempting to understand someone of the stature of Jacques Ellul, it would be easy merely to list external marks of distinction, implying that these are the best biographical clues. In the case of Ellul this would be a terrible misunderstanding. It is vitally important to note that when he talks of the one activity in which he believes

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Ellul's discouragement with the Reformed Church of France is due to two reasons. The first is the fact that the Reformed Church of France rejected the report of the "Commission on Strategy", with its suggestions for the reform of the Church and its ministry. This commission, of which Ellul was one of the ten members, worked for six years on its proposals. He believes that the suggestions were sound and that every possible tactical precaution had been taken, so that their introduction would be gradual and not offend custom ("Mirror," p. 202). He writes, "We were wrong. Some of our reforms were accepted, others so changed as to make them worthless, still others rejected outright. Well, our plan was of a piece; so it must be said that we failed. We came up against a ponderous apparatus (even though we were part of the governing organization), against tradition, against the indifference and apathy of the church's members" ("Mirror," p. 202). The second reason is that he was discouraged by the break-up of a churchly discussion on hermeneutics. All but "the three Barthians" (among whom he includes himself) dropped out of the study group dedicated to the question of the proper interpretation of the Bible ("Mirror," p. 202).

"These two failures so deeply influenced my thinking that I was led to conclude that the church, as church, was incapable of reforming itself, and that dialogue and communication were as difficult in the church as elsewhere — if not more difficult. Hence arose certain theological reflections. For if the Holy Spirit is present in the church, the church ought always to be reforming itself; and the Spirit will establish communication and true understanding in the faithful. So I asked myself whether God, who sometimes turns away, had actually abandoned our church. A question, not an affirmation" ("Mirror," p. 202). (Against those who interpret Ellul as simply anti-institutional, one must remember that he is here simply asking a question, not making a dogmatic declaration.) He generalized from the problems of the Reformed Church of France to the problems of the organized Church generally: "Where a thousand steps need to be taken, the mass of the faithful will consent to take only one. Moreover, the general view is that the church needs merely to adapt itself to society and modern thought — whereas it is just the opposite that must be attempted: so to structure the church that it can live and speak as an unassimilated foreign body in our society. But that is an idea that, so far as I can see, is impossible to realize today, an idea too high for the generality of the faithful" ("Mirror," p. 203).

1. Ellul's editorship of this journal seems irreconcilable with the view that he has "dropped out" of the organized Church.

that his Christian witness is most free, he refers to his directorship of and personal involvement in a "prevention club", an organization designed to minister to young people in need of help: delinquents, runaways, those contemplating suicide, etc. The purpose of the club is to provide a context of fellowship, where such young people can feel accepted and can grow in their self-understanding. In addition to providing interpersonal relationships and a kind of therapy (devoid of a rigorous application of psychological techniques), the club also attempts to provide learning through various sports activities (parachuting, mountain-climbing, etc.).[1] We believe that this glimpse of Ellul reveals what he regards as really important to him, and is probably more important for understanding him than those aspects of his life which mark him as a "famous" man.

Earlier in Ellul's life he had been a member of a small group of Frenchmen concerned with exposing the problems in Algeria.[2] As early as 1934, he and the journal Esprit had sought to put the Algerian problem before the French public. He had written articles calling for intervention, that a federalistic solution might be offered or a system of double nationality established. Years later, in 1956, he concluded that it was too late for any just solution and that France's defeat was inevitable. Many French intellectuals were in 1956-1958 calling for support for the National Liberation Front.[3] Ellul could not in good conscience support the National Liberation Front because he believed that "its victory would necessarily result in the impoverishment of the French colons, in a dictatorship, and in far-reaching retrogression in

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1. "Work and Calling," Katallagete: Be Reconciled IV, Nos. 2-3 (Fall/Winter 1972), pp. 14-15.
2. In the letter of Sept. 14, 1972, Ellul said that the Esprit group was not the only one in France concerned with the Algerian question at this early date, but he implies that it was the main group.
3. "Mirror," p. 201.

every department of Algerian life".[1] He was angered by the hypocrisy of those who did nothing when something could have been done, but who later, at a time when no solution was possible, stepped forward to offer one-sided support for the National Liberation Front, support which meant nothing but the endorsement of violence.[2] He parted company with the majority of French intellectuals: "I refused to sign petitions, to take part in demonstrations, to vote on synodal motions. Besides, it seemed to me that petitions and so on were of little importance. I found myself very much alone and under severe criticism on the part of those who supported the 'good cause'."[3]

Ellul tells us that this experience concerning the Algerian problem led him to think more carefully about the role of the Christian intellectual. He came to believe that one of the Christian intellectual's functions is to see social problems as they emerge in their early stages and to sound warnings when situations are still fluid and capable of solution. He came to believe that once events become publicized, passions unleashed, and opinions popularized, it is too late for just solutions.[4]

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1. "Mirror," p. 201.

2. He says that these Christians supported the National Liberation Front's use of violence, while rejecting the French army's use of the same ("Mirror," p. 201). This awareness of political special pleading is the background for Ellul's later criticism of politicized thought.

3. "Mirror," p. 201.

4. "Mirror," pp. 201-2. See also False Presence, pp. 186-190; The Politics of God and the Politics of Man (1972), pp. 85-6, 101. "It seems to me," he writes (False Presence, p. 187), "that to the very extent that the Church depends upon another Lord and another Kingdom, for which she is ambassador to the world, she ought to have sufficient independence so that Christians would be capable of understanding the true issues with which man is to be faced tomorrow, in a manner very different from that of the partisan or the statistician. The giving of this warning would be extremely useful to mankind. It would be much more important than deciding in favor of a given solution, in a situation already at its climax or at the point of deterioration." Ellul is here arguing for an indirect political role for the Church. For additional suggestions concerning indirect political activity see pp. 310-316 below.

We now move from biography proper to a consideration of Ellul's phenomenal rise to popularity in the United States in the years since 1964. Though The Presence of the Kingdom and The Theological Foundation of Law were available in English earlier, it was with the publication of The Technological Society in 1964 that a wide segment of Americans began to read Ellul's writings. The background is this. The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions (at Santa Barbara, California) was becoming increasingly concerned about the problems of technology. In 1959 John Wilkinson (from the Center) asked Aldous Huxley for his opinion concerning contemporary European works on the subject. Huxley recommended Ellul's La Technique (published in 1954) above all others.[1] Wilkinson undertook the difficult task of translating La Technique and Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., published it in 1964. Three years after the English publication of this work a steady stream of books by Ellul began to be published in English, from one to three per year! The two previous books available in English were re-issued; books written earlier in French were translated into English; books recently written in French were immediately translated; two books were even directly translated, English being the first language of publication.[2]

Though Ellul's reputation in Europe is immense, in part due to his participation in the French Resistance and in the World Council of Churches, the irony is that at the present time he seems to be even more influential in America than in France. The eminent Church historian Martin Marty wrote: "If I were asked to introduce a man from the

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1. John Wilkinson et al., Katallagete, p. 59: "According to Huxley, the book had 'really made the case' that he had tried to make in Brave New World, that he was 'jealous of the author's penetration', and further, that the book would become one of the 20th century's most authentic documents of social criticism ... Huxley repeatedly compared Ellul's work with Spengler's magnum opus" (op. cit., pp. 59-60).

2. The Ethics of Liberty will be translated directly into English and is scheduled to be published in America in the spring of 1974.

Protestant orbit to let the church know what I think its agenda should be, it would be Ellul."[1] Ellul's sociological insights and criticisms are particularly apt for America, a country in the forefront of technological developments. His theological insights are even more important for America, a country which has always been a bit illiterate when it comes to sound biblical theology.[2] A man combining both sociology and theology — Jacques Ellul — offers America a challenge she can little afford to ignore.

Not only has Ellul exerted a phenomenal influence in America in recent years, but he has been read by an incredibly wide spectrum of readers. A glance at the bibliography will show that he has had access to magazines and journals of the most diverse sorts: scientific journals, Roman Catholic publications, a student journal, and Protestant publications of both liberal and conservative theological orientations. It is hard to think of another man today who has access to such a wide group of publishers and readers.

If Ellul's influence in the United States continues to increase, one reason may be that America particularly needs the kind of bridge building that he represents — bridge building between young and old, pietists and activists, conservatives and liberals. The strange thing is that Ellul does not set out to build bridges; he is caustic in his style and much of his content is offensive to everyone! Perhaps his thought is even most helpful at those very points where he shakes us

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1. Martin Marty, National Catholic Reporter — printed on the back cover of Introducing Jacques Ellul. Time magazine, in 1970, hailed The Meaning of the City as "perhaps the most important theological book of the year" — printed on the back cover of The Judgment of Jonah.

2. One could argue that Barth's theology has never made a major impact in America, though it has influenced the thinking of some theologians. Ellul may represent the first real wave of Barthian influence in America, though Ellul, of course, is no mere Barthian.

loose and forces us to reconsider our basic presuppositions.[1] If Ellul is "relevant" it is because he is a genuine prophet in the full Christian sense of that word. With urgency and authority he seeks to represent God; he has not been bought off by any popular clique of this world. He is a remarkably free individual because he is not in the least concerned to be a liberal, conservative, or radical, in either the political or the theological sense of these vague terms. Ellul is simply striving to be a Christian witness, faithful to Jesus Christ in the twentieth century.

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1. The significance of Ellul's thought is thus blunted to the degree that people handpick one aspect of his thought and totally ignore the other. Students discontented with society do him an injustice if they read his sociology but not his theology. Likewise churchmen distort his thought if they pay attention to his theology but ignore his sociology. (The latter is not as easy to do as the former, since much of his critique of the modern world is present in his theological writings.) John Wilkinson's paraphrase of Kant is indeed correct: "Ellul's theology without his sociology would be empty, and his sociology without his theology would be dead" (Katallagete, p. 59).

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

By way of introduction we will first seek to outline the scope and limits of this work, to establish what we are and are not seeking to accomplish — in short, to state our purpose. Second, we will deal with some of the problems involved in our task, and thus will explain the specific approach we will need to take account of these difficulties. Third, we will give some indication as to why we think it is worth while to pursue our purpose in spite of the problems involved.

Purpose

As the title indicates, we are concerned to come to an understanding of Ellul's Christian ethic. We must not apologize for the word "Christian" in our title. We are seeking to probe Ellul's thought to see what it means for the living of the Christian life and for Christian strategy in the twentieth century. In a sense we are looking at Ellul's thought from the perspective of the Church, asking what he has to teach the Church concerning her self-understanding and the ordering of her life. We are seeking to understand and assess the uniquely Christian presuppositions which inform his ethic. We are asking the following question: What does Ellul teach concerning the nature and basis of the Christian life?

Since we are asking this question we will avoid another equally legitimate approach. We will not give a detailed critical exposition of Ellul's sociology (this task has been well undertaken by others).[1]

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1. See Katallagete: Be Reconciled, II, Nos. 3-4 (Winter/Spring 1970), later published as Introducing Jacques Ellul under the editorship of James Y. Holloway (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970). The Katallagete issue is excellent! It is no depreciation of that/...

This is not to say that we are unconcerned with his sociology, but that we have no independent interest in this. We are not here concerned with Ellul's sociological ideas per se, but with the relationship of his sociology to his theological ethic. Thus it is entirely beyond the scope of this work to point out sociological parallels in the writings of other sociologists.

While not giving exclusive attention to Ellul's theology, we are giving primary attention to his theology. This is as Ellul would have it, since he understands the Christian ethic as decisively related to Christian theology. As with Barth, ethics in Ellul's understanding is an inseparable aspect of Christian belief in God. Thus as a work in Christian ethics the sister disciplines that we will rely upon most are systematic and biblical theology rather than secular sociology.

Problems and Methods

We now consider some of the difficulties involved in our work and thus the kind of approach needed to take account of these difficulties. A first problem, which might seem to invalidate our whole effort, is the simple fact that Ellul is a layman who makes no claim to be a formal "theologian". What is the value of assessing the theology of a man who is not a professional theologian?[1] The answer is simple: one need not be a professional theologian in the modern sense of this word in order to write vitally important theology. Modern biblical scholarship has

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that work to point out that it deals mainly with Ellul's sociology and only occasionally with either his theology or his theological ethic. As far as this writer is aware there has been no major work on Ellul's theology nor on his ethic.

1. "I make no claim to being a philosopher or dogmatician. I can never look at anything sub specie aeternitatis" ("Mirror," p. 200). Ellul says that of his theological writings only The Theological Foundation of Law in "pure" theology. He explains that the rest represent a theology of engagement and combat, intended to provoke decision (Letter, Jan. 2, 1972). We note that he does not deny that his works are theological; he only attempts to explain in what sense they are so. There can be no debating the fact that theology is at the centre of his concern: "Today my thinking centres on the search for a Credo for the Church of tomorrow" ("Mirror," p. 204).

shown that most biblical authors had profound theological intentions and their writings can only be properly assessed if we pay careful attention to their theology. Yet it is doubtful that even the apostle Paul or the author of the Fourth Gospel can properly be called "theologians" in the modern technical sense of this word. If the Bible is any guide in this matter, it becomes obvious that one need not be a professional theologian to write important theology.[1]

Whether Ellul is a theologian or not is entirely a matter of definition and not in the final analysis important. What is important is that he is an extremely knowledgeable and sophisticated witness to the meaning of the Christian faith. He has a masterful knowledge of biblical theology,[2] of the theology of the Protestant Reformation,[3] and of contemporary theology.[4] The fact that he usually writes in a lively style and strives to be free from the traditional jargon of technical theology is a mark in his favour, not a blemish on his theological record: even academic theologians should have the wisdom to see this.

Perhaps it is best to refer to Ellul as a "lay theologian". This

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1. It might be objected that the biblical authors were trained in the scholarly methods of biblical interpretation of their day. True, but this is a far cry from modern theology in the technical sense of the term. What separates Ellul from modern professional theology is his refusal to use the traditional academic form when writing theology. His theological writings are also extremely unsystematic and devoid of the technical jargon of processional theology. Also, he does not strive for "objectivity" in the scientific sense of that word. He freely expresses his own convictions. One wonders, however, whether Ellul is not closer to the theological task as biblically defined than many of his professional counterparts. Has not professional theology in recent years become all too much a matter of the second-hand examination of other men's theologies? Do not many professional theologians owe their very existence to the fact that men such as Ellul have convictions which they in turn can discuss and assess?

2. See Ellul's detailed exegetical study of 2 Kings in The Politics of God.

3. See Les Chrétiens et l'Etat (1967).

4. See the 42 pages of footnotes in To Will and To Do (1969). French Christian intellectuals regard Ellul as a theological thinker of immense importance, otherwise his editorship of the prestigious French journal Foi et Vie is inexplicable.

term shows that we recognize that he is a theologically profound and serious writer, but also shows that we recognize that he does not claim to be a professional theologian. We can be grateful for Ellul's own informal writing style, his freedom of approach, his exuberant enthusiasm, and his creative way of interrelating theology and sociology. It is at least debatable whether formal theological training[1] would have encouraged the development of these unique gifts. While being grateful for the fact that Ellul is a layman, and while taking seriously the layman's right to speak theologically and to be heard by all, it is nevertheless the case that certain problems involved in interpreting Ellul's thought relate to the simple fact that he is a layman.

Because a professional theologian earns his living by his theological teaching, he has much more time to devote to the logical clarification and refinement of his theology. He can weigh his words and sentences carefully, think out various subtle shades of meaning and seek a coherent and precise presentation. Whether his thought is true or even inspiring, he nevertheless has the time to be careful, clear, and non-contradictory. This is the service of formal theology, a service the Church can little afford to do without if she values truth.

A lay theologian earns his living in ways other than the teaching of theology; hence he has less time to devote to careful and precise theological formulation, and even less time if he is expected to publish at anything like the pace of Ellul. The lay theologian may have more to say than his professional counterpart, but he doesn't have as much time to spend saying it. Thus certain difficulties are particularly associated with lay theology, at least in Ellul's case.

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1. By this we mean the study of theology as an academic discipline in a university or seminary, as contrasted with individual reading. Ellul has done none of the former and plenty of the latter.

The major difficulty involved in interpreting Ellul's Christian ethic is the unsystematic nature of his theological writings.[1] The impression one gets when reading many of his theological writings is that they were written in the heat of battle. Many of them read as though Ellul in a burst of enthusiasm felt called to sit down and write, but scarcely had time to re-read what he had written. One finds repetitions and seemingly contradictory statements even within the same book.[2] His individual words and sentences are usually clear enough and present no major problems of interpretation. The difficulties arise when, remembering what he said at one place, you compare it with what he said elsewhere. The problems become even more acute when you compare statements in one book with related statements in other books, bringing into the conversation the amazing breadth of Ellul's spectrum of interests.[3] He has an extremely dialectical style of writing which is so paradoxical that it is difficult to determine the truth-claim he is

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1. Arnold Beichman, not without some justification, has accused Ellul of applying the "stream-of-consciousness" technique to modern sociology (Arnold Beichman, "Is Technique Running Us?" Christian Science Monitor (Sept. 24, 1964), p. 7). One might add that Ellul's theological writings are much less systematic than his sociological ones!

2. I agree with John Wilkinson when he says, "Ellul has not worked out his theology as thoroughly as he has elaborated his social criticism" (John Wilkinson et al., Katallagete, p. 58). However, the fact that his theology is less systematic and harder to get hold of should not lead us to think that it is of little importance. Ellul's theology is assumed and operative at every point in his work.

3. "As for Ellul himself, he is hard to pin down. Were it not for his most distinctive style and its caustic effects, one could hardly believe it is the same man who has written all the books he has published to date. I make this remark not only because the range of his interests includes law and ethics, sociology and technology, as well as theology, but also because he can anticipate a theme and denounce it when it becomes a slogan. Thus some thirty years ago when 'revolution' was not a word whose resonance would appeal to Christian ears, Ellul was among the first to 'listen in'; and now, just published in Paris, his latest book is entitled Autopsie de la révolution. Previously, his well known Présence au monde moderne had already found its counterpart in Fausse présence au monde moderne. Not that he contradicts himself. But he does not step twice in the same river" (Gabriel Vahanian et al., Katallagete, pp. 16-17).

really making unless you compare one-sided statements from one place with one-sided statements from elsewhere.[1] Ellul admits that his theological thought has only progressively become clearer.[2] These difficulties are further compounded by the fact that his theological works are all intensely polemical. It is always much easier to say what he opposes than to state the precise content of his own theological affirmation.

Granted that these problems exist (and they probably exist in part simply because Ellul is a layman), our method of interpretation must be designed to deal with these difficulties. We must seek to interrelate his theological statements, bringing them into a systematic relationship with one another in a way which he himself has not done. We must see if systematic coherence can be found, so that the truth of his theology may be properly assessed. We ought not to be under any illusion that our systematic method is any improvement over Ellul's informal and unsystematic presentation. It's just that we hope that by assessing his Christian ethic in this way it will then be possible to more clearly understand and evaluate what he is actually saying. His unique contribution to theological ethics is his application of Christian theology to modern life-settings. Ellul is a practical theologian, a theologian less concerned with the formal statement of principles than with the application of Christian truth to life.[3] It is part of our task to test the adequacy of his practical theology by a careful appraisal of the actual theology assumed in his position. To do this we must certainly

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1. It seems to us that a nearly infallible principle for interpreting Ellul's writings is this: Never interpret one statement without putting it in conversation with other related statements.

2. "I have come to a progressively clearer view of my writings and to the principles underlying them ... The writings I had undertaken in a tentative frame of mind assumed a progressively better structure" ("Mirror," pp. 200, 201).

3. Ibid., p. 200.

take account of his theological polemics, but we must press beyond them by asking what he is affirming rather than what he is denying.

To understand precisely what Ellul is affirming, not only will we need to draw together his various statements, but we will need to relate these statements to the amplification provided by the theologians from whom he has learned. We will pay attention to the more developed statements by other theologians of thoughts which he states in less developed ways. Since we are seeking an understanding of Ellul's theological ethic and not seeking to give a full exposition of other theologians' thoughts, we must ruthlessly restrain ourselves from developing these parallels beyond the point where they illuminate his thought. (We are not attempting to do a comparative theology, but are seeking to assess Ellul's thought.) We will note also the way in which he independently parallels various other theological thinkers through a common appreciation of a biblical understanding.

In addition to seeking to locate Ellul's theology within the context of the thought of other theologians, we will utilize the theologies of various thinkers to help us critically assess and evaluate his position. Of course, most of our critical comments will come directly from our own encounter with Ellul's thought.

Because of the above difficulties Ellul's theological work is not easy to interpret. We can make no claim to have offered <u>the</u> definitive interpretation; all we can claim is that we have done our best to be fair and have sought to understand. This writer has the feeling that Ellul and his thought will always to a certain extent remain an enigma. Try as we may, we will never fully understand either the man or his thought, yet from what we can understand we can see that the effort is well worth while.

The Promise of Ellul's Ethic

Ellul makes no claim to be coining a new theology. While at all points seeking to be faithful to a Christocentric biblical faith, he uses insights from various "Neo-Reformation" thinkers. Though individual items in his theology are not new, the mixture is unique. Even more unique is his way of applying theology, thus expanding the meaning of theological statements by setting them in new contexts. It is our conviction that such a creative synthesis and new application is itself theologically significant and hence deserves careful study.[1]

Aside from the inherent value of Ellul's ethic (a value which we can truly see only in the process of examining it), there is an indirect reason why it is important to study his theological ethic. It may be that the rest of his thought is in jeopardy unless his theology is understood.[2] Ellul's critique of civilization is so ruthlessly critical that it can lead to utter hopelessness and nihilism if isolated from its

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1. Ellul greatly contributes to the task of enabling "Neo-Reformation" theology to be heard in America. He utilizes insights from Barth, Bonhoeffer, Kierkegaard and Rudolf Bultmann, while remaining remarkably free in his selection. (He takes account of Reinhold Niebuhr's theology, but usually disagrees with it, while often agreeing with Niebuhr's social analysis.) Ellul's own freedom comes because he is himself engaged in seeking to understand the biblical message, and hence uses insights from theologians only if he believes those insights to be faithful to scripture. For example, he is extremely critical of Bultmann's method of interpreting scripture, and yet learns from him concerning certain important features of Johannine theology.

2. There is evidence that Ellul's sociology is indeed being isolated from his theology. When we remember that his leap to popularity in America came with the publication of The Technological Society, whereas his earlier two theological books had gained little attention, we see a sign of this danger. Also, it is common knowledge that The Technological Society is popular reading among "radical" students in America. It seems unlikely that these same students are reading Ellul's theological writings.

   It must also be admitted that within Ellul's sociological works he makes little explicit reference to his theology; from a reading of his sociological writings one might not even be aware that he is a Christian. Of course, once one understands his theology, one can see the relationship between his theology and sociology.

theological counterpart,[1] his affirmation of the Christian Gospel. It is possible that a knowledge of his Christian ethic may help protect against a nihilism which could be encouraged by reading his sociology out of context.[2]

It may even be true that the best point from which to see the relationship between Ellul's theological and his sociological insights is his Christian ethic. Though he bases the Christian life on normative biblical beliefs, he nevertheless sees the Christian life as the point of "agony" where the sinful ways of the modern world are confronted by those who owe allegiance to the "Wholly Other" God known in Jesus Christ. If we pay attention to this point of intersection, we may be able to see the way in which Ellul's scathing sociological criticism serves to clear away obstacles so that a genuine Christian way of life may emerge in its own integrity.[3]

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1. "I have sought to confront theological and biblical knowledge without trying to come to any artificial or philosophical synthesis; instead I try to place the two face to face, in order to shed some light on what is real socially and real spiritually. That is why I can say that the reply to each of my sociological analyses is found implicitly in a corresponding theological book, and inversely, my theology is fed by socio-political experience" (Ellul et al., Katallagete, p. 5). The theological counterpoint to The Technological Society is The Meaning of the City; the counterpoint to The Political Illusion is The Politics of God and the Politics of Man; the counterpoint to Propaganda will be The Ethics of Liberty.

2. "Just as post-war France established what we call the theater of the absurd, Professor Ellul may now claim to have produced the sociology of the absurd with its continuing emphasis on man's bewilderment, his helplessness, his utter futility in the world of Technique" (Arnold Beichman, "Is Technique Running Us?" p. 7). "Perhaps Ellul should add the Christian apology to his sociological works, for otherwise they are spirals of down-tending pessimism" (Stephen Rose et al., Katallagete, p. 45). In our view Ellul has written his Christian apology in the form of a direct proclamation of the Gospel; it's just that the apology does not appear in the sociological writings.

3. "From the beginning my thinking revolved chiefly around the contradiction between the evolution of the modern world and the biblical content of Revelation" ("Mirror," p. 200).

CHAPTER I

CHAPTER I

THE HUMAN CONDITION: BONDAGE

Ellul believes that man in his natural state is not free, but is rather in bondage to various determinants. He also believes that this bondage, this absence of freedom, can begin to be overcome only as man receives the gift of God's grace. The whole shape of Ellul's ethic is decisively related to these two interrelated convictions. He bases both beliefs on Christian theology, yet at both points he translates his theology into sociological language, giving classical theological ideas an additional range of meaning. In Chapter One we will examine Ellul's understanding of the human condition and in Chapters Two and Three we will deal with his exposition of the meaning of divine deliverance.

Sin

Ellul has several diverse but interrelated ways of describing the human condition. One way is to speak of the human condition as that of sin. He defines sin as autonomy, separation from God.[1] He identifies his view of sin with the Pauline and Johannine understanding, believing that Paul and the author of John understood the fundamental condition of man as the search for self-justification and autonomous life. In Paul's understanding and for the Fourth Gospel sin is equated with the failure to live in and from God. In later Christianity, he thinks, sin was often understood as the failure to measure up to objective laws.[2]

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1. False Presence, p. 29.
2. To Will and To Do, p. 276.

Ellul believes that man has totally fallen from any true communion with God and that this broken relationship with God radically corrupts man's entire being and his relationship with others.[1] He thinks that sin has so totally corrupted man that he "can neither discern God's will nor accomplish it".[2] Because he defines sin as autonomy or separation from God, even if an outward action is pleasing to God it is still seen to be an expression of sin if it is committed by one who does not dwell in a covenant relationship with God.[3] Ellul, however, has little confidence that natural man is apt to agree frequently with God's will even in a merely objective sense. While recognizing that natural man

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1. "Either the communion with God is the very ground of one's being, of life and the good, in which case the rupture of that communion changes the whole, or else the change is only partial, which implies that communion with God was only secondary and not decisive" (To Will and To Do, p. 39). "Nowhere are we told that nature conforms to the good or is capable of producing the good. To the contrary, all men are by nature children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3) ..." (ibid., p. 46). Ellul thinks that to deny man's radical fallenness is to deny the truth of God's grace in Jesus Christ (ibid., p. 276). "If the fall and evil were not totally serious would God have gone to the extreme of this unthinkable sacrifice of his Son, of this incomprehensible self-deprivation? For the work of salvation to be as great as that, the alienation in the fall must have been fundamental. The whole must have been shattered for the whole to have been restored. The whole must have been lost for the whole to have needed to be saved by grace" (ibid., p. 41).

2. "Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien," Foi et Vie (March-April 1954), p. 165.

3. If one makes the mistake of speaking of sin as merely self-love or the absence of altruism, then it is impossible to affirm the radical fallenness of man, for it does not seem empirically true that all acts committed by non-believers are selfish. If sin is a broken covenant relationship with God, then it is possible to affirm the radical fallenness of man. It may be possible to reconcile Reinhold Niebuhr's anthropology with Barth's and Ellul's if we realize that Niebuhr was speaking of sin mainly in the first sense and Barth and Ellul in the second. All men may be totally depraved in the sense that all men have fallen from a covenant relationship with God (Barth-Ellul), but men may not be totally depraved, if by this we mean that men naturally love only themselves and are utterly incapable of having regard for others. (I am indebted to N.H.G. Robinson for his development of this distinction between total depravity in the religious sense and total moral depravity; see Faith and Duty (1950), pp. 138-9, and Christ and Conscience (1956), pp. 70-71.) However, differences still arise as to the degree to which sin entails moral disruption and whether natural man's morally pleasing acts serve as points of contact for the receipt of grace.

may occasionally do acts objectively in agreement with God's will,[1] Ellul's fundamental stress is on the disastrous results for human life of man's separation from God.

Ellul's understanding of man's radical fallenness and his understanding of the covenant basis of the good is perhaps best expressed in the following words describing the reality of prayer:-

> I must realize that if I pray I signify and attest by that very act that I am inclined to evil, that my nature is incapable of carrying out the good, that my will is not free, that my reason is defective in that area, that my conscience deceives me. More than that, in the act of praying, I am signifying that the good is not an objective reality known in advance, with evil as an equivalent opposite, as though I had a choice to make between the two things. I am signifying that, to the contrary, evil is a condition, a situation which affects me, and that it is not visible to the eye like a tumor in healthy flesh. I am signifying that the good is not a source for objectifiable commandments, but that the good is the will of God. Even if I am not a theologian, that is what I mean when I pray.[2]

In prayer man realizes that sin is decisively autonomy and knows that God's will is a personal reality (not just an outward conformity at the level of acts). For Ellul the dynamic of the Christian life has to do with the gift of grace which overcomes human autonomy and redirects man toward obedience to God's personal will.[3]

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1. See below, pp. 36-41.

2. Prayer and Modern Man (1970), p. 81.

3. Ellul agrees with Barth that man can know his sin, his broken covenant relationship, only in the context of the renewal of that covenant relationship (To Will and To Do, p. 273, citing Barth, II/2, pp. 747-748). "In reality ... man has even less knowledge of the true evil than he has of the good. Man learns what is evil; that is, discovers himself as a sinner, at the time of the revelation of the good as the will of God ... He learns it at that time only. He can have no true natural experience of it whatsoever; because all natural experience of evil will necessarily be ambiguous ..." (To Will and To Do, pp. 16-17). Like Barth, he emphasizes the freedom of God in revelation and denies a natural "point of contact" for the receipt of grace, even a negative one based on a natural awareness of sin. However, in an earlier work he did affirm that man is capable of a natural knowledge of the wickedness of the world. He wrote, "'There is none righteous, no not one' (Rom. 3:10) ... The world of the present day teaches us that this doctrine is neither an idea nor an explanation. It is a statement of reality, which is just as concrete as/...

Ellul's understanding of the human condition is very similar to Rudolf Bultmann's exposition of Paul's theology.[1] We find no acknowledged dependence at this particular point; both men share a common understanding of a biblical theme. Bultmann, like Ellul, thinks that Paul defines sin not in terms of external moral acts, but in terms of the sphere of influence in which a man lives:-

> The sinful self-delusion that one lives out of the created world can manifest itself both in unthinking recklessness (this especially among the Gentiles) and in considered busy-ness (this especially among the Jews) — both in the ignoring or transgressing of ethical demands and in excessive zeal to fulfill them. For the sphere of "flesh" is by no means just the life of instinct or sensual passions, but is just as much that of the moral and religious efforts of man. [2]
> .....
> The attitude which orients itself by "flesh", living out of "flesh", is the self-reliant attitude of the man who puts his trust in his own strength and in that which is controllable by him. [3]

Bultmann understands Paul as believing that only a life lived in the miraculous life-giving Spirit of God is pleasing to God.[4] To live according to the "flesh", to use natural existence as the norm of life, is seen in his interpretation of Paul to be the essence of sin.[5]

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as the solidarity of all men in modern war" (The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 13). From the context we can see that Ellul in this early quotation was referring not only to a natural knowledge of wickedness, but also to a natural knowledge of sin. Thus there seems to have been a movement in his thought at this point paralleling Barth's own movement from an existentialist understanding of the human condition to a more consistent theology of revelation.

1. Ellul's acceptance of Barth's "One Kingdom" reasoning protects his thought from the kind of inner-outer dichotomy one finds in some of Bultmann's writings (see below, pp. 88-9). Ellul is very clear that Christ claims the whole life of the Christian, internal and external.

2. Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, transl. Kendrick Grobel, Vol. I (1951), p. 239.

3. Ibid., p. 240.

4. Ibid., p. 235.

5. Ibid., p. 238. Victor Paul Furnish's understanding of Paul's theological ethic is also in agreement with Ellul's position. Speaking of Paul's theology Furnish writes (Theology and Ethics in Paul (1968), pp. 193-4): "The law is not really kept by those whose obedience is measured in terms of their formal adherence to a collection of statutes, but/...

The Fallen World

Ellul describes the human condition in a broader context than that of separation from God. When he speaks of a fallen world we can begin to see the way in which his sociology is consistently related to his theology.

He bases his understanding of the fallenness of the world mainly on New Testament teachings and Johannine theology in particular:[1]

> The world is still the world. The entire Gospel of John is there to testify to that. The world is a hostile power in revolt ... The Prince of this world is still Satan. He wields an extraordinary power even when vanquished, as Oscar Cullmann reminds us.[2]

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but only by those whose obedience consists in their new life in the Spirit, in their belonging as whole persons ('secretly', 'in their heart', i.e. inwardly), to the Lord. Paul's conception of obedience is further illustrated in his polemic against 'works of the law' ... When the concept of obedience is formalized and externalized, the effect is to limit its meaning to the performance of specified, measurable, and visible deeds. Thereby the obedient acts are regarded as possessing value in and of themselves, quite independently of the one who performs them. It is precisely this formalization and externalization of the concept of obedience which Paul understands 'works of the law' to represent. They are acts regarded as having meritorious value for the one who does them, accomplishments by which the doer presumes to establish and make secure his relationship to God. When Paul rejects the view that justification is something earned in this way, he is rejecting the superficial conception of obedience which it presupposes. When, in its place, he claims that justification is on the basis of faith apart from works (e.g. Rom. 3:28), he is presuming that faith means the surrender of every supposed claim that the doer has on God, and acknowledgment of and surrender to the total claim God makes on him."

1. Ellul simply quotes New Testament Scripture to make the point that the world is Satan's domain (Rev. 12:9), that it is in revolt against God (John 15:20; Luke 16:13) and that it is incapable of accepting Christ's teachings (John 15:20-25) (Ellul, "Signification actuelle de la Réforme," in M. Boegner and A. Siegfried (eds.), Protestantisme Français (1945), p. 142).

2. False Presence, p. 16. Ellul even makes the following bold statement, arguing for the radical fallenness of the world on the basis of belief in the Incarnation. "To attribute value to the world is to deny the incarnation. If God loved the world, it is because the world was not lovable and good. If God reconciled the world to himself, it is because the world was in a state of rebellion and rejection. But this loved and reconciled world is still the world. It is not yet the Kingdom. The works of the world remain works of darkness, but darkness into which a light has come, which does not validate or justify the darkness" (ibid., p. 38). Is not this statement a fair representation of Johannine theology? Is not our embarrassment with Ellul at this point really an embarrassment with the Fourth Gospel?

Though Ellul does not explain what the fallenness of the world may mean in terms of the non-human realm, he thinks that it has fundamental implications for society. He believes that the world's fallenness points to a supra-personal demonic power which is embodied in society's institutions.[1] He conjoins New Testament apocalyptic thought (two ages, the present being under Satan's influence) with his extreme sociological realism:-

> It is too easy, and in fact false, to go so far as to say that the society, the environment in which we are living is not 'the world'. Indeed it is! The political, economic and technological world is the world which the Gospel of John speaks of as radically lost and radically the enemy of God: and its works are not good works.[2] ... When Satan proposes to Jesus Christ to turn over to him the dominion over all the kingdoms of the world he is not lying. He continues to have authority over the political powers, and Jesus in no way disputes that point with him.[3]

Ellul reaches his conclusion about the fallenness of the world from direct exegetical study. Current New Testament scholarship seems to confirm his point. New Testament scholars recognize Paul as having understood the present "age" or "world" as evil and wicked (Gal. 1:4; Phil. 2:15) and filled with all kinds of immorality (I Cor. 5:10). Though Paul believed that God is the Creator of this world, he shared the apocalyptic belief that the present age is captive to powers hostile to

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1. The correlate sociological statement of the same is that "institutions have a weight of their own which causes them to go where men sometimes do not want them to go" (The Politics of God, p. 182).

2. Ellul does not here choose his words carefully, since at face value this sounds as though all non-Christian deeds are objectively contrary to God's will. Elsewhere (cf. below, pp. 36-41) he explicitly denies this. What we can see from a statement such as this is that he has little confidence that non-Christian acts are to any great extent in agreement with God's will.

3. False Presence, pp. 16-17; cf. also p. 38. "It is a mistake to emphasize — as is always done — that the word 'world' has several meanings in the Bible, and to suppose that 'cosmos' in the natural sense has nothing to do with the world of power, revolt, and opposition that John in particular speaks of. I think that it is society in the first place that is the world of revolt, rejection and negation" (Violence, p. 25).

God.[1] The Johannine witness, while recognizing God as Creator (Jn. 1:3) and as sovereign Lord even amid evil's power (I Jn. 4:4), affirms that the "world" has turned away from God (Jn. 1:5) and has placed itself under the rule of the "evil one" (I Jn. 5:19), "the prince of this world" (Jn. 12:31; 14:30; 16:11; see also Mtt. 4:8ff.).[2] Neither Paul nor John denies that in a mysterious way God is still the sovereign Lord of the world — neither does Ellul. The Pauline and Johannine witness, as well as Ellul's interpretation of them, affirm that God rules over a rebellious world, a world which is not only enslaved to sin but in bondage to supra-personal demonic powers. The biblical viewpoint may be described as a "relative dualism", a reign of evil which is ultimately subject to

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1. Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, pp. 115-116. "Thus," writes Furnish (p. 116), "Paul speaks of the rulers of this age who are 'doomed to pass away' (I Cor. 2:6), and the god of this world (II Cor. 4:4), and the elemental spirits of the cosmos (Gal. 4:3). While these rulers and powers cannot finally frustrate the purposes of God (Rom. 8:38) and will at last be destroyed by him (I Cor. 15:24), their power still has its effect in the present world." Paul sees these hostile powers as enslaving man to their purposes (Gal. 4:3) and blinding man to God and the Gospel of Christ (II Cor. 4:4). Paul believes that these powers are ultimately behind Christ's crucifixion. He also describes natural man as in bondage to the power of sin (Rom. 3:9; 6:17,20; 7:14,23; Gal. 3.22) (Furnish, loc. cit.).
   C.K. Barrett (From First Adam to Last (1962), p. 90) argues that to do justice to Paul's thought his "'principalities and powers' must be taken seriously and objectively. But what does it mean to take them seriously and objectively? It cannot mean less than the recognition that there exist cosmical conditions and circumstances which actively engender sin, suffering, and death ... It is naturally possible to believe in the objectivity of these conditions and circumstances without believing in their personality; and it is also possible to see that so far as the human conditions for their existence have ceased to be — that is, as Paul would say, in Christ — these forces have lost their strength and grip ..."

2. Rudolf Schnackenburg, The Moral Teaching of the New Testament (1965), p. 310. "As for Paul, so for John the kosmos means primarily the world of men; on it the judgment falls that it is evil and would be lost were it not for the coming of the 'Son'" (Bultmann, Theology, Vol. 2, p. 15; see also Vol. 1, p. 239). "Thus, the creation has a peculiarly ambiguous character: on the one hand, it is the earth placed by God at man's disposal for his use and benefit (I Cor. 10:26); on the other, it is the field of activity for evil, demonic powers. ... The perishable 'creation' becomes a destructive power whenever man decides in favor of it instead of for God (Rom. 1:25...); i.e. when he bases his life upon it rather than upon God" (Bultmann, Theology, Vol. 1, p. 230).

the rule of Christ. Ellul's unique contribution is to express this biblical point of view in sociological language and thought forms.

Both the Protestant Reformers and modern "Neo-Reformation" thinkers have spoken of the bondage of the will to sin. Ellul extends the meaning of this thought by relating it to modern social determinants.[1] "It is a commonplace to speak of slavery to sin, but in reality this needs to be translated from the inward life to the totality of life in speaking of the order of necessity."[2] That man has lost his freedom means in part that natural man conforms to the sociological patterns of the world.[3]

> Scripture everywhere reminds us that man's independence in relation to God is in the strict sense bondage as regards sin. This man is not free. He is under the burden of his body and his passions, the conditioning of society, culture, and function. He obeys its judgments and setting. He is controlled by its situation and psychology. Man is certainly not free in any degree [my underline].[4] He is the slave of everything save God.[5]

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1. From what we have said concerning his understanding of sin, we can see that Ellul is no mere "environmentalist" in his understanding of the human condition. That is, he sees the human problem as based on man's separation from God, not on mere external factors. Ellul, however, believes that separation from God has social implications and that society itself works to transmit a false understanding of man (separation from God and disobedience). Sin not only implies bondage to the world (in the form of sociological determinants), but sociological factors help to perpetuate the human dilemma. Because Ellul will not choose either a one-sidedly individualistic or a one-sidedly corporate understanding of the human condition, his analysis is necessarily circular.

2. To Will and To Do, p. 281.

3. Violence, p. 91.

4. Ellul's reasoning seems to be that bondage to sin (autonomy) implies that natural man is incapable of transcending the conditioning of his society (see also A Critique of the New Commonplaces (1968), pp. 230-232; The Political Illusion, p. 238). This is not to say that all non-Christian acts are objectively contrary to God's will. Ellul, however, does argue that separation from God implies that such things as murder, war, and pollution are the "normal" state of affairs and that it is a divine miracle when these are held in check (The Politics of God, pp. 178-9).

5. The Politics of God, p. 16. "Man is enslaved to sin. This slavery includes, engulfs and explains all others. Political slavery, economic alienation, servitude to passions, sociological necessity are all forms, expressions,/...

Ellul's understanding here is based partially on his New Testament theology, but is also based in part on his understanding of the findings of modern science:-

> The mathematical, physical, biological, sociological and psychological sciences reveal nothing but necessities and determinisms on all sides. As a matter of fact, reality is itself a combination of determinisms, and freedom consists in overcoming and transcending these determinisms. Freedom is completely without meaning unless it is related to necessity, unless it represents victory over necessity.[1]

He refers to political regimes and economic planning as reducing man's freedom.[2] Most of all he refers to man's bondage to technical necessities.[3] He concludes that man is not the master of his means, but is the "object of the forces which he has created".[4] Ellul concludes from theological and sociological insights that freedom cannot be regarded as an immutable fact, a natural datum of the human heart.[5]

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expressions, aspects of this essential slavery which is that of sin" ("Le Sens de la Liberté chez Saint Paul," Foi et Vie (May-June 1962), p. 4).

1. The Technological Society, p. xxxii.
2. To Will and To Do, p. 169.
3. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 71-2, 76.
4. Ibid., p. 76.
5. Ellul explicitly says that he does not claim that man is more determined by society today than in the past, but only that man is differently determined today. Instead of being hemmed in by prohibitions and taboos, man is today determined by a technological civilization (The Technological Society, p. xxix). This statement is in Ellul's foreword to the revised American edition of The Technological Society. An objective reading of that book seems to indicate that to a considerable extent he does think that the situation is now morally worse than ever before. He may try to qualify this impression with these words in the new foreword, but I doubt that many readers will be convinced. In a considerably earlier work he had already said, "In no other civilization has man been so totally repressed ... All civilizations have imposed a certain amount of restriction, but they left man a large field for free and individual action. The Roman slave, the medieval serf, was freer, more personal, more socially human ... than the modern industrial worker or the Soviet Union official. Our civilization which claims to exert no restraint, tries to dominate man as a whole, and to confine him within narrow limits, where all his gestures, and his secret thoughts, will be controlled by the social machine. This represents the triumph of means. It is this new fact which hinders men from living the Christian faith" (Presence of the Kingdom,/...

It is at least open to question whether Ellul has overstated his case at this point. Even if one accepts the notion of the total fallenness of man, one can still debate whether separation from God necessarily implies total conformity to one's sociological milieu, rather than merely a strong degree of such conformity. One might argue that bondage to sin severely lessens the possibility of transcending sociological conditioning but that it is not an all-or-nothing issue. Is it theologically so obvious that separation from God implies such total sociological conformity? If so, where is the exegetical basis?[1] If the case is not to rest on theology alone, but on scientific observations, is it so clear that science proves only the existence of sociological determinism? Many would want to point to examples of non-Christian behaviour which seemingly transcend social conditioning, at least at particular points.

Here we see an example of an interpretive problem that will continually confront us in Ellul's thought. He often seems to have discovered very valuable insights, but often overstates the amount of truth implied in those insights. One might, for example, agree that separation from God implies that natural man is usually unlikely to possess the moral resources needed to stand over against his milieu. One might

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Kingdom, pp. 77-8). Many may think that this quotation from an earlier work more accurately represents the general thrust of Ellul's social thought than his words of qualification in the new foreword to The Technological Society.

This last statement implies that even for the non-Christian there can be degrees of bondage to and freedom from society's values, since Ellul says that natural man was once freer in the face of society's values. This recognition undercuts Ellul's point that sin implies total sociological conformity. This lack of consistency perhaps points to the fact that Ellul's language concerning total bondage to sociological patterns is not carefully chosen. Elsewhere he can also refer to degrees of conformity to society when he writes that "the average Frenchman was much freer in 1685 than in 1950!" (A Critique, p. 102). (These last words also undermine the statement that man is no more determined today than in the past.)

1. In terms of Ellul's own theology this is a fair question, since he seeks a biblical rather than a philosophical basis for his theology.

also agree that scientific findings tend to validate the notion that natural man conforms to his environment to a great extent. Ellul sees these insights, but his formulation goes further and states that natural man is totally and absolutely conditioned by his society. Perhaps at these points we should remember that Ellul expressly tells us that his intention is to provoke thoughtful decision rather than to give final answers.[1] By painting sharp contrasts, he sounds warnings and provokes thought. It is then the reader's task to think through what he says and see if it can be formulated in a more careful and precise way which can more adequately withstand criticism.

Ellul goes on to describe several specific social determinants, such as the city, technique, politics and propaganda. He believes that these are influential factors in the way the modern world exerts a corrupting influence on man. At this point we will consider one such factor — the city.[2]

The Sin of the City

Though Ellul does not himself explicitly make this distinction, it seems that what he says about the city implies a distinction between the sin of the city and the sins of the city. What he says about the sin of the city might seem at first to be a mere reiteration of what he has elsewhere said about the sin of the world. If he refers to the city as under demonic influence,[3] he also refers to the social world as a whole as under this same influence.[4] The city thus seems to be one example

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1. "Mirror," p. 201.

2. We will indirectly also consider some of Ellul's statements about the technological society, since his thought about the city is integrally related to his thought about technique.

3. The Meaning of the City (1970), pp. 45, 102, 114.

4. False Presence, p. 16. At one point Ellul even refers to the city as a kind of symbol for the sinful world as a whole:- "We must not forget/...

of a more general phenomenon: man is embedded in the sinful structures of the world, structures which reinforce his autonomous separation from God.[1] Ellul's position concerning the city is related to his more general thought about natural man's bondage to sociological fate.

Though Ellul does not say so, he seems to be giving us a modern restatement of the doctrine of original sin. In effect, he is telling us that man is born into a world that has rebelled against God and whose rebellion has certain concrete consequences today. Prior to any conscious activity on man's part, he is already in bondage to a false understanding of life:-

> Man in his affective life, his intentions and ambitions, his judgments and prejudices, his habits and manners, his needs and thoughts, has been changed, whether he likes it or not, whether he knows it or not, by the simple fact that he lives in a mechanical environment, in obedience to the logic of machines.[2]

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forget that the city is the symbol of the world, especially today, when it has become the synthesis of our entire civilization" (Meaning of the City, p. 72).

1. In The Meaning of the City Ellul uses biblical language to make this point regarding the city. He speaks of the continuing influence and power of the exousia and stoichae. He states that the city "has a very definite spiritual character, an orientation toward evil and away from good which in no way depends on man" (p. 169). In The Technological Society he uses the language of sociology to make an analogous point regarding technique (p. 306): "What seems most disquieting is that the character of technique renders it independent of man himself ... The important thing is that man, practically speaking, no longer possesses any means of bringing action to bear upon technique. He is unable to limit it or even to orient it ... Technique is essentially independent of the human being, who finds himself naked and disarmed before it."
   Since Ellul's analysis of "technique" is not primarily a statement about machine technology, we should perhaps give his own definition of what he is talking about under the heading of technique or technology:- "In our technological society, technique is the totality of methods rationally arrived at and having absolute efficiency (for a given stage of development) in every field of human activity" (The Technological Society, p. xxv). The two central aspects of Ellul's definition of technique are thus a concern for efficiency and rationality.

2. A Critique, p. 229. Ellul's words on "technological convergence" seem to be a sociological statement of the bondage in which modern man finds himself. He believes that though individual technicians do not generally intend to manipulate men (only the advertising technicians are accused of wicked intent), the net effect of the multiple technical influences/...

So far the basic contours of Ellul's position make a great deal of sense. For anyone who believes in the radical sinfulness of man, it would be unreasonable to think that society is exempt from the problem facing individuals. We are born into a world that does an effective job of ignoring God, and this way of autonomy is proclaimed to us by society, though each one of us chooses this way for himself. There is no inconsistency between insisting on a covenant understanding of sin and yet realizing that the world as a whole helps to transmit this autonomous self-understanding. If individual men rebel against God they do so in a world that has already rebelled against God, continues to do so, and invites us to do the same. Like the world at large, the city helps to transmit and reinforce this false understanding of life.

Difficulties begin to appear when we recognize that Ellul's thought about the city extends considerably beyond the point just made. He is not content to see the city as merely one example among others of the

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influences converging on man is an "operational totalitarianism". He thinks that the result of technological convergence is that man loses his freedom and independence and becomes an object of techniques (The Technological Society, pp. 389, 391, 409; "Conformism and the Rationale of Technology," in G.R. Urban and M. Glenny (editors), Can We Survive Our Future? — A Symposium (1972), pp. 89-102). An inadvertent dictatorship by the technicians occurs, though individual technicians seek only to pursue their own limited goals using their own technical methods (The Technological Society, pp. 162, 169; "Technique, Institutions and Awareness," The American Behavioral Scientist 11 (July 1968), pp. 39-41). (Ellul thinks that the mark of the technician is the methodological avoidance of normative questions -- The Technological Society, pp. 160-161.)

Along these same lines, Ellul refers to the economy as man's master rather than his servant. He argues that modern economic systems control and subordinate other aspects of life and there is nothing that can be done to change the general situation ("L'Economie, Maîtresse ou Servante de l'Homme," in Ellul et al., Pour une Economie à la Taille de l'Homme (1947), p. 44). He refers to the fact that a nation's intellectual life is virtually in the hands of the publishers and those who control the mass media (ibid., p. 43). He argues that man's basic self-understanding now corresponds to economic reality, man having lost his autonomy in relationship to the economy (ibid., pp. 44-45). "Man is no longer opposite the economy as an independent creature. Man is included in the economy. He belongs to the economy, body and soul" (ibid., p. 45).

general phenomenon of social institutions helping to transmit a false understanding of life. He singles out the city for blame; both at the level of sin and sins he thinks that the city adds a unique corrupting influence which goes considerably beyond what is generally true of the social world as a whole.

Ellul says that in a very unique way man has used the city to strengthen confidence in himself, in his own security, and in the power secured through his own hands.[1] He writes of the city: "She has within her every disorder because she is the /my underline/ great means of separation between man and God, the place man made to be alone."[2] Instead of seeing the city as merely accentuating man's fallen state, he

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1. Meaning of the City, p. 117; cf. also p. 67.

2. Ibid., p. 119. Ellul even goes as far as to suggest that God's appraisal of the city, given in revelation, is that the city stands for man's autonomy (ibid., p. 7; see also pp. 168-169). He singles the city out for blame when he says: "It is only in an urban civilization that man has the metaphysical possibility of saying 'I killed God'" (ibid., p. 16). He also refers to the city as being especially "cursed" by God, cursed in a way going beyond God's general judgment on the world (ibid., p. 45). He can speak of a special curse of God resting on the city from creation onward (ibid., p. 48). This last reference surely borders on a dualism whereby aspects of the created world are seen as inherently bad. It may be no accident that Ellul occasionally refers to the city as itself a demonic power (ibid., pp. 61, 132), rather than as under the influence of demonic powers. At these points he seems guilty of a depreciation of the goodness of creation. It is not surprising that in his sociology there is a tendency to single out certain aspects of the modern world as inherently bad and incapable of good use. It is only fair to recognize that his evaluation of technique does not seem entirely self-consistent. At some places he affirms that technique is ambivalent, neither inherently good nor inherently bad ("The Technological Revolution: its Moral and Political Consequences," Concilium 6, No. 3 (June 1967), pp. 48, 51; "Conformism and the Rationale of Technology," p. 95; see also "Vers un Nouvel Humanisme Politique," in Ellul et al., L'Homme Mesure de Toute Chose (1947), pp. 17-18). His more characteristic thought is that technique is a monistic mass which will not tolerate moral judgments (The Technological Society, pp. 96-97, 111). At these last points he also seems to be saying that technique is inherently bad. At one place he says precisely that: he tells us that technique is "contrary to God's will" and "bad in itself" ("La Technique et les Premiers Chapitres de la Genèse," Foi et Vie (March-April 1960), p. 113). What is beyond dispute is that he dwells on the negative features of technology and seldom talks about the positive aspects (see "Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien," p. 169).

regards the development of the city as almost a second fall. It is very difficult to see how this aspect of Ellul's thought can be accepted, since separation from God is separation from God! If all men are separated from God, how can this autonomy be a unique function of the city? It is understandable that all social institutions (with the exception of the Church, when she is truly responsive to God) would transmit a false self-understanding, but by what right can the city be singled out for blame, in this regard? If the city is to be singled out it is the sins of the city which alone must be criticized. Granted a common alienation from God among all men, the city may indeed lead to particularly immoral sins against one's fellow-men. It is difficult, however, to see how man's basic alienation from God can be attributed to the city in any unique way. In accusing the city of uniquely contributing to man's sin, one wonders whether Ellul has confused sin (a religious category related to God and leading to sins) with particular sins (a moral category which is the result of sin).

The Sins of the City

In addition to speaking of the city's sin, Ellul refers to the sins of the city. He believes that the city encourages the development of particularly immoral forms of conduct whereby men violate each other:-

> The city must, in order to stay alive, have its night shifts, the accumulation of a proletariat, alcohol, prostitution (under whatever form it adopts, including the "very noble naturalism" practiced in Sweden), an iron schedule of work hours, the elimination of sun and wind. And it is simply false to say that we can do away with all this and still keep the city. This is the urbanists' illusion.[1]

He thinks that the unique meaning of the city is materialism: the city is said to have developed because men were willing to gather around the

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1. Meaning of the City, pp. 152-153.

industrial machine to produce and consume its products.[1] It may indeed be the case that there are particular sins associated with the city, some of which we have just listed. One wonders, however, whether this judgment concerning the city can be a timeless one based in part on a biblical ontology or whether it must be a matter of strictly empirical investigation. One also wonders whether Ellul does not have a personal bias against the city which is based on neither biblical nor sociological study but on personal inclination.[2]

Just as Ellul seemed to unfairly single out the city for blame regarding man's sin, he seems to do the same concerning human sins.[3] For example, he tells us that war is a phenomenon possible only in a city culture.[4] Harvey Cox writes, "Unlike what Ellul believes, urban civilization cannot be equated with warfare. On the contrary, many of the early cities emerged when people huddled close to protect themselves from the marauders who rode in from the country."[5] At places, Ellul

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1. The Technological Society, p. 113; Meaning of the City, p. 155. Of course materialism is not a new phenomenon of history invented by modern technological society. Ellul is not saying that it is. He is merely insisting that materialism is a more widespread form of disobedience to God today than in the past and that it is so because of the influence of the values emanating from the modern city.

2. The following quotation may indicate personal bias; it certainly indicates Ellul's belief that an ontology of the city can be biblically determined: "Man always attains a better equilibrium, always feels his best, and probably is his best, in a primitive environment. This is no ideology of the country, nor some brand of naturalism, but only a simple observation corresponding with the revealed fact that God wanted man in that situation" (Meaning of the City, p. 173). Is it so clear that these words do not represent an ideology of the country?

3. It may be true that some sins are particularly associated with the city, but are not other sins particularly associated with the country? For example, one might argue that gossiping is a much more characteristic feature of rural and semi-rural life than it is of the city. Perhaps on balance the sins of the city are worse than those of the country, but surely not to the degree Ellul imagines.

4. "We could find many causes of war — ontological, economic, technical — but Scripture affirms that the agent of war is the great city. There is no such thing as a great agricultural war. A rural people is never a ravenous people ... War is an urban phenomenon" (Meaning of the City, p. 51).

5. Harvey Cox, "The Ungodly City," Commonweal 94 (July 9, 1971), p. 357. Could/...

uses language which borders on outright cynicism, which seems more an expression of his bias than a description of the city. He can make a characteristic overgeneralization which seems ridiculous. "The man who disappears into the city becomes merchandise. All the inhabitants of the city are destined sooner or later to become prostitutes and members of the proletariat."[1]

The Biblical Basis of Ellul's Ontology of the City

Ellul believes that his ontology of the city is based on Scripture and that it therefore calls for an either-or decision of faith.[2] He is

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Could the clan wars in Scotland be said to be a function of the developing cities?

1. Meaning of the City, p. 55. He casually mentions the fact that intellectual life cannot exist outside the city (ibid., p. 151). Concessions such as this one might seem to indicate a more balanced appraisal of the city, but Ellul does not develop such comments but drops them and goes on to emphasize the negative aspects of the city (as he also does with technology). The following passage shows the lengths to which he will go to depreciate the city, seemingly contradicting his own insight that intellectual life is a function of the city: "The city is dead, made of dead things for dead people. She can herself neither produce nor maintain anything whatever. Anything living must come from outside. In the case of food, this is clear. But in the case of men also ... The city is an enormous man-eater. She does not renew herself from within, but by a constant supply of fresh blood from outside" (ibid., p. 150). Such emotive language does not foster confidence in the objectivity of Ellul's thought concerning the city!
   For Ellul's hopelessness about the improvability of the city and the technological society, see below, pp. 169-171 and fn.

2. "Everything we have said so far concerning the city was of biblical origin, which means that it was an appeal to a decision of faith. Either we believe that the Bible expresses the revelation of God centered in Jesus Christ and that therefore what we have understood concerning the city has an element of truth, or else we do not believe it" (ibid., p. 179).
   Ellul differs from Barth as to whether the Bible implies a world-view. He, unlike Barth, thinks that the Bible does imply certain sociological facts and that it can thus be used to correlate and interpret these facts. (This theological conviction certainly casts suspicion on the objectivity of Ellul's sociology.) He writes, "The reality of the city, not as an event, but as a structure of the world, can be understood only in the light of revelation. And this revelation provides us with both a means of understanding the problem and a synthesis of its aspects as found in the raw data of history and sociology ... Revelation/...

quite certain that the Bible does offer an ontology of the city,[1] but he admits that it is only because the city has recently become such a monster that we are able to see that Scripture has indicated all along that it was so.[2] The second half of this last statement may seem to defeat the first half. If the Bible offers a clear ontology of the city should not this have been obvious before now? If the Bible's ontology of the city can be discovered only because recent events lead us to see things others have not seen before, may this simply be because the Bible offers no clear ontology of the city and because we are simply reading modern sociological viewpoints back into the Bible?[3]

The exegetical procedure used by Ellul to deduce his doctrine of the city is itself open to question. Does not Ellul time and time again lift specific references to God's judgment from their original historical contexts, wrongly assuming that God's judgment at those points concerns the city as such? Is not Ellul's exegetical procedure at this point highly inferential and perhaps even non-historical? Does he not deduce a unified doctrine of the city only by isolating and then synthesizing references to the city which occur in historical contexts not directly

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Revelation — which was not given with this in mind, but which incidentally serves in this way — enlightens, brings together and explains what our reason and experience discover" (Meaning of the City, p. 153; see also p. 179). John Wilkinson (Katallagete, p. 61) says that Ellul regards the Bible as implying sociological facts, but not all sociological facts — only the exceedingly important ones. Ellul's thought here represents a fundamentally un-Barthian understanding of the relationship between natural reason and revelation. Barth is less willing to use the Bible to pre-judge sociological reality.

1. Meaning of the City, p. 8.

2. Ibid., p. 42.

3. Not only does Ellul's radical pessimism regarding the city set his position off from traditional Christian viewpoints, it also seems to isolate him from the mainstream of current Christian attitudes. If very few Christians agree that the modern city is as monstrous as Ellul assumes, then his hermeneutical key for unlocking the meaning of the Bible at this point cannot itself be assumed to be a given.

implying judgment on the city, but judgment on Israel or on man generally.[1]

Human Morality

Ellul's conclusion about human morality is that it is of the order of the fall, that it is a part of man's autonomous existence over against God.[2] He believes that however helpful and important human morality is, it is a morality created by sinful men and thus does not transcend man.[3]

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1. Even in Ellul's most convincing text, the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4-9), the specific reference to the city may be really only an aspect of God's judgment concerning the corrupting influence of culture and civilization generally. The text may be a critique of man's tendency to use self-reliance, fame, alliance, and political development to fence himself off from God (Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, transl. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), pp. 143-148).
   It should be noted that at one point Ellul refers to the city as that reality which comes into existence whenever a human group asserts its existence over against nature and over against other human groups (Meaning of the City, p. 149). Here he identifies city-culture with the barest minimum of civilized existence, saying that the city is "one of the rare invariables of civilization" (ibid., p. 150). This broadened definition of the city is, however, uncharacteristic of Ellul's general thought, for he singles out the modern city for blame and could not possibly do so if he were working with such a broad definition of the city. Besides, if he really took seriously such a broad definition of the city, he would render his whole discussion hopelessly vague; by definition he would regard as a city-culture all forms of human organization which have progressed beyond the most rudimentary form of cave-man existence.
   Ellul sees it as a fact of vital significance that men's inability to communicate with one another is said to have occurred in the city (ibid., p. 19). By the same type of reasoning, one could just reverse his conclusion and argue that it is of vital significance that the fall is said to have occurred in a Garden! To attempt to squeeze an ontology of the city (or of the country for that matter) out of such texts (texts dealing with pre-history) is surely to miss the real points that the authors were trying to make and to use the Bible as a sounding board for expressing opinions arrived at by methods other than biblical exegesis.
   S.H. Hooke points out that Genesis 4 divides between verses 1-15 and verses 16-26 and that in the first strand Cain is seen to be a nomad (Gen. 4:12b) while in the second he and his descendants are seen to be city dwellers ("Genesis," by S.H. Hooke, in Peake's Commentary on the Bible, general editor and New Testament editor Matthew Black, Old Testament editor H.H. Rowley (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962), p. 181). This observation undermines Ellul's ontology of the city, since his whole line of reasoning about the city begins with the assumption that it (and not the country) is to be understood in terms of Cain (Meaning of the City, pp. 1-43).
2. To Will and To Do, p. 39.
3. Ibid., pp. 103, 112-113.

He writes of human morality, "It is neither a divine gift nor a product of higher nature over and above man. It is not universal. It is tied to the power which man has taken upon himself of 'knowing good and evil' and deciding concerning them."[1] It is because of Ellul's covenant understanding of the Christian good that he cannot regard autonomous human morality as anything other than sinful:[2] "Sin is not the failure to obey a morality. It is the very desire to determine that morality independently of God, a desire which is at the same time concupiscence, the will to power."[3] He thinks that the Genesis account of the Garden of Eden indicates that an autonomous knowledge of good and evil is precisely what the Bible understands as human sin.[4] Ellul says that he agrees with Karl Barth's denial of the possibility of a natural knowledge of God and thus agrees with Barth's denial of the possibility of a natural knowledge of the Christian good.[5]

Ellul recognizes the obvious existence of human morality. However, he insists that since it is based on human autonomy it must be completely distinguished from the Christian good,[6] which has to do with personal obedience to the living God. Because he believes that God

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 113.

2. That Ellul sees the Christian good as the fruit of man's covenant relationship with God is indicated when he writes, "In Scripture, there is no possible knowledge of the good apart from a living and personal relationship with Jesus Christ" (ibid., p. 16).

3. Ibid., p. 13.

4. Ibid., pp. 14-15, 42, 271.

5. Ibid., p. 16. Barth indeed does understand natural morality in the way Ellul has suggested. He speaks explicitly of natural ethics as a prolongation of the fall (Barth II/2, pp. 517-518), and writes of human ethical systems, "Revelation and the work of God's grace are just as opposed to these attempts as they are to sin ... The grace of God protests against all man-made ethics as such" (II/2, p. 517). He believes that Christian ethics, quite unlike human morality, has to do with the grace of God addressed to men (II/2, p. 518). Barth and Ellul are of one mind in totally opposing "the fatal assimilation of the Christian to the human" (Barth, II/2, p. 534). For an identical point of view see Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 142-144.

6. To Will and To Do, p. 45.

requires a holiness which comes from a relationship with Himself; mere human virtue and good works cannot measure up to God's expectations.[1] In the final analysis, Ellul's separation of human morality from Christian obedience is based on his belief in the centrality of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. He believes that natural man does not possess the Spirit (I Cor. 2:14) and thus cannot do a good which is pleasing to God. In this sense Ellul equates the natural with the sinful.[2]

It comes as no surprise that Ellul does not think that men in their natural consciences have an ability to perceive God's will.[3] He is in total disagreement with those early post-New Testament theologians

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1. To Will and To Do, pp. 44-45.

2. Ibid., p. 46. Ellul quotes Barth to the effect that natural man uses the law as an autonomous form of instruction which contributes to his own separation from God (ibid., p. 276). Ellul points out that Jesus' most severe attack was reserved for the Pharisees, who established a rigorous morality, but a morality of autonomy (ibid., pp. 276-277).
   He agrees with Reinhold Niebuhr (The Nature and Destiny of Man (1949)) when Niebuhr points out the autonomous nature of human systems of ethics. He disagrees when Niebuhr understands the autonomous nature of ethics as a favourable observation about man's condition (To Will and To Do, p. 277). Niebuhr retained the view that natural man is capable of a degree of self-transcendence, which is a kind of ethical point of contact between natural man and God. Ellul, like Barth, believes that natural man has totally fallen from his covenant relationship with God, — that whatever self-transcendence natural man may possess is of no value in the procurement of grace. Ellul disagrees with Niebuhr's view that through a natural sense of justice man can approximate to the Christian good. He points out that Niebuhr fails to see the unbelievable variety in the actual content of justice in various civilizations. Also, he points out that Niebuhr's understanding of justice is itself determined by Christian content (mediated through Western tradition) and thus does not represent the actual reality of justice throughout the world (To Will and to Do, pp. 292-3). He concludes: "It is not surprising, then, that Niebuhr can establish a relation between this creation which he considers 'natural' and the Christian faith!" (ibid., p. 293).

3. Victor Paul Furnish comments on Paul's understanding of conscience. Paul "never establishes conscience as a firm principle or guide for moral action. Its chief function is to evaluate actions (e.g. Rom. 2:15; I Cor. 8:7ff.; 10:25ff.) or persons (e.g. Rom. 9:1; II Cor. 4:2; 5:11), not to identify and define 'the good' or 'God's will' either abstractly or concretely. Conscience has a strictly limited and provisional place in the Christian's life" (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, p. 229).

who insisted that fallen man retains intact a true knowledge of good and evil. He thinks that such an approach can be sustained only if one starts with philosophical rather than biblical assumptions.[1] If knowledge of the good has to do with a personal relationship with God, it is incorrect to say that people possess a natural knowledge of God's will. This would be the case only if the Christian good had to do with certain objective rules or principles or if the relationship with God were an innate gift of creation (not requiring repentance).[2]

Ellul's thought at this point is decisively influenced by Barth and Bonhoeffer. With Barth, he agrees that natural conscience is not the voice of God.[3] With Bonhoeffer, he agrees that natural conscience has to do with man's agreement with himself and is based on the fall rather than on God.[4] He agrees that natural conscience is based on autonomy and hence must give way to responsibility before God, which is seen to be something entirely different.[5]

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 14.

2. "The doctrine of grace eliminates the possibility of the value of a moral conscience. The conscience is neither the reflection of God (who only reveals himself in Jesus Christ), nor the place where God speaks (for one cannot separate the encounter with God in scripture from the encounter within the person by the Holy Spirit); nor is it the voice that judges us (for it is God, in the moment in which he gives himself, who reveals to us our true guilt), nor the receptacle in us of a hidden truth which revelation merely brings to light (without grace we cannot believe the gospel, so how can it be pre-existent in us?). Conscience holds no knowledge. The Holy Spirit entering into us sets up a dialogue other than that of conscience. To pretend to validate the moral conscience is, in the last analysis, to empty out the entire doctrine of grace" (To Will and To Do, p. 57). Ellul agrees with Soë (Christliche Ethik, sec. 5 and 7) that moral conscience is a human phenomenon which has no reference to revelation (To Will and To Do, p. 279).

3. To Will and To Do, p. 57, citing Barth II/2, p. 668.

4. Ibid., p. 279, citing Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 161ff. "In effect, the conscience in no way implies a relation of man with God, and instead of leading man to find his unity by the covenant with God (act of grace), it claims to cause man to find his relation with God by man's inward peace with himself" (To Will and To Do, p. 279).

5. To Will and To Do, pp. 279-280, citing Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 211ff.

Ellul is not denying that the inward aspect of man can become the instrument for God's speaking. If the conditions outlined are maintained, if "conscience" is used only with reference to Christ's free relationship with the converted Christian and if "conscience" is related to the written word of Scripture, then the content of his position is not inconsistent with the use of the word "conscience". Ellul himself at one point refers to a Christian conscience, which is the consequence of revelation.[1] Bonhoeffer also does so.[2] Even Barth speaks of the command being given to conscience, as contrasted with it being given by conscience.[3] Even Barth is not able to abandon totally the use of the word conscience.[4]

Ellul also tells us that human morality is of the order of necessity. The order of necessity refers to the conditions which result from man's separation from God.[5] Granted the fact of the fall, granted that natural man seeks to know good and evil, human morality becomes a necessity. He agrees with Barth that sinful men not only can make distinctions between good and evil but must make such distinctions.[6] "The consequence of man's decision to be like God is, among other things, his being subject to a certain good that is not the will of God but that forms part of the order by which the world lives."[7] Ellul is not here

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1. To Will and To Do, pp. 55-6.
2. Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 212-213.
3. II/2, p. 668.
4. Helmut Thielicke agrees with Barth and Bonhoeffer on the inability of natural conscience to perceive the will of God (Thielicke, Theologi-Ethics (1966), p. 300) and he goes on to speak at some length of a Christian "conscience" in terms which would surely be unobjectionable to Ellul. Thielicke speaks of conscience becoming the voice of God as man is conquered by the revelation of God (ibid., p. 319). "If it is to be pacified, conscience must learn to understand itself in a wholly new way; it must 'die', as it were" (ibid., p. 313).
5. Violence, p. 128.
6. To Will and To Do, pp. 280-281, citing Barth, II/2, pp. 586-7 on p. 281.
7. To Will and To Do, p. 62.

saying that human morality is without value, only that it is determined not by obedience to God but by various human necessities.[1]

Individuals feel the necessity of living in a universe where things are divided up according to whether they are good or bad. Thus human morality is based in part on psychological necessities. Men seek a steady and dependable line of conduct to follow. "The individual will obey whichever necessity is the most urgent, because he inevitably seeks to avoid conflicts and tensions."[2]

Ellul also thinks that there are social necessities which form the basis of natural morality. He tells us that some degree of common moral content is necessary for the sake of the preservation of the groups in which individuals live.[3] "Life is possible within an ethical system. Apart from that it would be a constant warfare, and interpersonal relationships would be unthinkable. Therefore, we must respect this morality for its utility, since it is useful to man."[4]

When Ellul says that human morality is based on social necessity, he means not only that morality is necessary for the preservation of

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1. To Will and To Do, pp. 65-66. Ellul believes that because man has separated himself from God, various necessities have appeared. He believes that nature as it now is is not nature as God intended it to be. Thus the fact that something is necessary or natural does not mean that it is good (ibid., p. 46; Violence, p. 128; Theological Foundation of Law, p. 11) in the Christian sense. Ellul, for example, says of propaganda that it has become an inescapable necessity for everyone. But he insists that in saying this he is not putting a positive value on propaganda nor trying to encourage its use (Propaganda (1969), p. xv): "In my opinion, necessity never establishes legitimacy ... To say that a phenomenon is necessary means, for me, that it denies man: its necessity is proof of its power, not proof of its excellence" (ibid.). He thinks that it is precisely in facing up to the inevitability of a phenomenon that the individual begins to have some hope of transcending it (ibid., p. xvi).

2. To Will and To Do, p. 65.

3. Ibid., p. 62.

4. Ibid., p. 80. "The experience of our time shows, and the humanities are helping us to understand better and better, that people can only live together and cooperate with one another on the basis of a shared moral structure" (ibid., p. 160; see also p. 72).

groups. He also means that morality is determined by heredity, biological life, the environment, and education.[1] He is extremely Marxist in the sense that he (like Barth) sees human morality as determined by human necessity and does not see it to be an expression of transcendence.[2] (He thus relates a Barthian understanding of the fall, man's quest for a natural knowledge of good and evil, to his own sociological relativism.) He points out that the question of applicability itself becomes a norm and in the end the decisive norm of natural morality.[3] Because he thinks that human morality is based on immanental environmental factors,[4] it is not surprising that he thinks that the content of human morality fluctuates throughout history.[5] He thinks that human values are linked to the societies in which they are embodied and perish with the perishing of those societies.[6]

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 63.

2. Ibid., p. 291. "The moral structure, the defining of the good, are ideological expressions of the social and biological determinants with which the individual lives. The good is determined by historic, geographic, and psychological circumstances" (ibid., p. 63). "In reality, the good which morality affirms is a good determined by necessity ... Man is remarkably predetermined ... What he achieves as good, what he defines as evil, are completely relative and essentially variable notions ... Henceforth, the morality that man formulates is never an act of his freedom" (ibid.).

3. To Will and To Do, pp. 67-69. "Like technology and politics ... morality is an art of the possible ... The necessary becomes the good" (ibid., p. 66).

4. Ibid., p. 63.

5. Ibid., pp. 74, 118ff.

6. Ibid., p. 152. "Ethics are never a proof of man's freedom ... It is no use to say that the just, the good, and the beautiful are proclaimed anew. That is true. But their contents differ according to the place and the moment" (ibid., p. 70). "Morality has no permanent content. Murder is generally reproved but that is not always true" (ibid., p. 118). "In point of fact, if we base ourselves not on a preconceived idea but on what people live and treat as morality we see that the latter varies extraordinarily with times and places" (ibid., pp. 123-124). "Every morality dies. Everything that man proclaims as good today is laughed at and flouted tomorrow or it merely collects dust, becomes anemic and collapses of itself. The successive collapse of ethical values is the best proof from experience that when all is said and done, morality is of this world of the fall, where/...

Though Ellul believes that human morality is based on the fall, though it is seen to be based on autonomous existence, nevertheless this sinful human morality is seen as necessary in a fallen world which must operate on the basis of its false assumptions. The world would not be the world if it could govern its life on the basis of the Spirit morality of the Christian Church. Because Ellul believes that God sustains human existence through natural moralities, he thinks Christians ought not to seek to destroy human morality.[1] He tells us that God tolerates human morality because it is useful to man.[2] Through the existence of human morality man's life is preserved,[3] and it is preserved so that God in His own mysterious freedom may bring man into a covenant relationship with Himself.[4]

Dual Morality: A Qualification[5]

Ellul concludes from his discussion of human morality that for the Christian there are two kinds of moralities in the world:-

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where tragic destiny reigns ... There is nothing in morality which is free of the general law of absolute destiny: death — the work of man" (To Will and To Do, pp. 69-70).

1. To Will and To Do, pp. 79-80.

2. Ibid., p. 80.

3. Ibid., pp. 80, 99-100.

4. Ellul agrees with Bonhoeffer that the morality of the world constitutes the "next-to-the-last things" which "were neither condemned by the finality of revelation nor validated by a compliment of grace" (To Will and To Do, p. 99; see Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 84-98). Ellul, however, is much more concerned than was Bonhoeffer that human morality should not be regarded as a preparatory step toward faith in Christ. Ellul regards human morality as a competitor which often helps to prevent men from responding to Christ in obedience (both men regard human morality as based on the fall). Regarding human morality itself, all that Ellul is willing to affirm is that it is of value because it helps to hold the world in existence (To Will and To Do, p. 100). Though he refers to Bonhoeffer at this point, in actual fact Ellul has a more modest evaluation of the role of human morality than the Bonhoeffer concept of "things-before-the-last" really indicates.

5. See below, pp. 82-83, for another perspective on dual morality.

> On the one hand there is the revelation of the good according to God, and all that is entailed by that. On the other hand there is the elaboration of a morality by man in the given circumstances in which he finds himself. These two moralities are in contrast with one another in all fields of action.[1]

In Ellul's thought, there is a sense in which the contrast between human morality and Christian obedience is not as absolute as this statement seems to imply. He believes that the contrast is absolute in the sense that human morality is human; that is, it is based on autonomy and hence is sinful. He believes that Christ overturns all human morality in the sense that Christ establishes a different criterion of good — covenant faithfulness to God.[2] Ellul, however, believes that non-Christian acts can sometimes be in agreement with obedient Christian acts. The contrast between human morality and Christian obedience is not always absolute at the level of concrete action.[3] It is important to understand him at this point, for what he says here is crucial for his understanding of the relationship between Christians and non-Christians.

Ellul tells us that he is not preaching a "systematic maladjustment" to society. Rather, he is simply reminding us that the biblical view does not allow us to see adaptation to society as an inherent value.[4]

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 82.

2. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

3. Ellul explicitly affirms that non-Christians can do acts objectively in accordance with God's will (To Will and To Do, pp. 36-7, 49, 79, 89-91, 97; Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 89-90). Put the opposite way, Christians can sometimes in good conscience act in agreement with non-Christians: "There can be a coincidence, either accidental or volitional ... between what a society calls good and the good according to God ..." (To Will and To Do, p. 36). He tells us that at particular points a judgment or decision made by a socialist or a platonist morality could be in agreement with a truly Christian stance. But he warns that this agreement can only take place "at the level of concrete and piecemeal operations. As Niebuhr has emphasized (Nature and Destiny), the search for justice, resistance to tyranny, the demand for peace, are indications of moral judgments which are valid, but which are always intermingled with principles of violence and hate" (To Will and To Do, p. 90).

4. False Presence, p. 58. He speaks of "the fine balance between the positive and negative features" in the Christian's attitude toward society ("Conformism and the Rationale of Technology," p. 102).

(Then again, neither does the biblical view see rebellion against society as an inherent value.) Though the Church must represent the values of her Lord, though she must in this sense be separate from the world, nevertheless her conduct does not have to be absolutely unique at all points.[1] Extending Ellul's argument in terms of the logic of what he says, we could interpret his position as follows:-

The Church's task is simply to be faithful to her Lord. At many points this will mean that the Church's action will need to be distinctive; however, the Church is required only to aim at faithfulness, not at absolute distinctiveness. If the world agrees with the Church at the level of specific action, and if the Church is convinced that she has arrived at her position in obedience to her Lord, then she can join the world at those points. The issue for the Church is neither an abstract agreement nor an abstract disagreement with society — but obedience to God. Neither agreement nor disagreement with the world can become a general principle for the Church. Agreement or disagreement must be the concrete event in which Christians find that, in obedience to Christ, they can agree with a line of action in the world, or in which, in obedience to Christ, they find that they must not do so. Thus, the degree to which Christians can agree with non-Christians will vary according to time and place. The norm for determining such agreement or disagreement as may exist will be obedience to Christ (direct obedience, using the Bible for instructional preparation.[2]

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1. False Presence, p. 83.

2. In the above interpretation, we are taking very seriously Ellul's view that the Church is not to seek to be systematically maladjusted to society (False Presence, p. 58; see also p. 83). As often, one's interpretation of Ellul's thought depends on which statements are taken to be characteristic of his major thrust and which ones are regarded as careless and peripheral. Thus, there is a danger of subjectivity in any interpretation of Ellul's thought, but running this danger is surely preferable to merely cataloguing contradictions. In favour/...

As we have seen from our previous discussion, whatever agreement there may be between human morality and Christian obedience is not to be attributed to some natural moral or religious relationship which all

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In favour of our interpretation at this point is Ellul's general ethical point of view that what is important in the Christian life is concrete obedience to God's will (see below, pp. 94ff.), not some philosophy of absolute disagreement with society.

Ellul does sometimes make statements which, taken literally, would seem to imply a speculative opinion as to the degree to which Christians and non-Christians can or cannot agree at the level of concrete acts. The fact that these statements contradict each other may indicate that this is not the heart of Ellul's concern.

In support of the rarity of agreement between Christians and non-Christians at the level of acts, one could quote the following:- "Within the faith, then, it is a matter of expressing the oddness of Christian conduct by starting with the person of Jesus Christ. But be very sure that this does not mean a striving after originality at all costs, or an i p s o f a c t o rejection of all modes of human behavior. There can be an occasional /my underline/ and accidental overlapping at the behavior level" (To Will and To Do, p. 89). "In the majority /my underline/ of instances, moreover, there will be a conflict between the two moralities, or again, ignorance and indifference on the part of the world's morality toward Christian morality" (ibid., p. 92). In one statement, Ellul even seems to be affirming the very "systematic maladjustment" to society which he has denied is his intention. He writes, "Nothing /my underline/ in the life of these Christians corresponds to what men call good" (To Will and To Do, p. 43). These statements taken at face value seem to imply that Christian behaviour can seldom, if ever, be in agreement with non-Christian behaviour.

That these statements should not be taken with this degree of seriousness is evidenced by the fact that diametrically opposite statements can be set next to them. Ellul writes, "Obedience to the current morality, doing what others around us call 'good', is one of the elements of the Christian life itself" (To Will and To Do, p. 78). He goes even further when he writes, "You can obey the morality of man. Normally /my underline/ you should do so" (ibid., p. 79). Elsewhere he says of the non-believers in charge of the world that "in normal conditions they discharge their task correctly" (The Judgment of Jonah (1971), p. 29).

Ellul's "impressionistic" writing style, his contradictions and his ambiguous statements make the task of interpretation difficult. At this point, one wonders if the contradictions don't themselves indicate something of positive value. May it not be that he is indecisive about the degree of agreement between Christians and non-Christians, because such a general discussion is hopelessly vague? The presence of contradictions here may indicate that in the back of his mind he knows that any degree of overlap can only be decided with reference to concrete issues facing specific people. Any inherently revolutionary or inherently conservative philosophy would pre-judge that which can only be decided with reference to the varying conditions present in diverse societies.

The fairest interpretation of Ellul's thought at this point may be to let/...

men have with God. Ellul follows Barth in emphasizing the freedom of God and in denying a moral or religious "point of contact" for the receipt of grace. Both men understand the goodness present in natural man's conduct as due to the mysterious sovereignty of God and not due to some inherent worth present in natural man.[1] There may be occasional agreements between Christians and non-Christians at the level of acts because Christ is objectively the Lord of the world, not because natural man is somehow subjectively related to Christ.[2]

There is certainly biblical warrant for refusing to set Christian obedience in total antithesis to the ways of the world. For example, Victor Paul Furnish writes that "Paul's concern is not to be 'original' or to foster a morality of exclusively 'Christian' content," and continues:-

> He readily appeals for support to any sources — pagan, Jewish, or Christian — which uphold the kind of conduct he wishes to commend and attack the vices he wishes to condemn. By doing this he is taking quite seriously his own advice to "test everything, hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil".[3]

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to let his contradictory statements cancel each other and, instead, pay attention to his general point, that Christian obedience is not necessarily in total antithesis to worldly morality at the level of concrete acts. If there cannot be a synthesis between Christian obedience and the world's morality (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 16), neither can there be a systematic and total dualism between Christian action and the ways of the world.

1. See To Will and To Do, p. 292, for Ellul's reference and apparent agreement with Barth at this point.

2. Ellul writes, "In the event that there is agreement, it does not mean that Christian morality is an extension of natural morality, nor that it completes it, but only that the life of faith does not annihilate nature and that God does not abandon humanity, even in its most rebellious state and at the focal point of its sin" (To Will and To Do, p. 92). Barth writes, "In all ages the will of God has been fulfilled outside the Church. ... Indeed, to the shame of the Church it has often been better fulfilled outside the Church than in it. This is not in virtue of the natural goodness of man. It is because Jesus, as the One who has risen from the dead and sits at the right hand of God, is in fact the Lord of the whole world, who has His servants even where His name is not yet or no longer known or praised" (Barth, II/2, p. 569; see also IV/3(I), pp. 476-477; Robert E. Willis, The Ethics of Karl Barth (1971), p. 173).

3. Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, p. 72; see also p. 241. How, then, does Paul approach practical matters of conduct? We find him/...

Paul was not concerned that Christian conduct be absolutely unique at all points, only that it be absolutely faithful to God. On the basis of the knowledge of God revealed in Christ and on the basis of direct obedience to the Holy Spirit, he was able to use non-Christian moral wisdom in a selective way, subordinating it to his Christian convictions.

In Ellul's emphasis on the importance of a Christian style of life, he certainly agrees with Matthew's Gospel that the Christian's righteousness must exceed that of the scribes and the Pharisees (Mtt. 5:20). This, however, is not to say that the Christian life must be absolutely different at all points!

When Ellul says that the Christian can only occasionally agree with non-Christians at the level of acts,[1] he may do so, not because he wants to offer a timeless philosophy concerning the Church's relationship to the world, but because he is so convinced that the greatest danger to the modern Church is adaptation to the world's values. By stressing the occasional aspect of the agreement between the Church and the world, he

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him time and again, seeking to be informed by every possible datum available — the facts of the situation at hand, the teaching of Scripture, some word of the Lord, the practice of Christians generally, the ethical wisdom of the ages, or even — once, anyway (I Cor. 11:14) — "nature itself" (Victor Paul Furnish, The Love Command in the New Testament (1972), p. 216). "He never supposes that 'what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Rom. 12:2) has an exclusively Christian provenance. Thus, for example, he does not hesitate, in exactly the same context as that in which he appeals to the Christian creedal tradition and to the church's scripture (I Cor. 15:3ff., 45ff.), to appeal also to a quite secular proverb, 'Bad company ruins good morals' (I Cor. 15:33; cf. Menander Thais, Fragment 218). Similarly, Paul's listing of particularly repulsive vices (Rom. 1:29-31; 13:13; I Cor. 5:10-11; 6:9-10; II Cor. 12:20-21; Gal. 5:19-21) and of particularly commendable virtues (II Cor. 6:6; Gal. 5:22-23; Phil. 4:8) shows the extent to which his ideas of 'good' and 'bad' are in accord with those of contemporary ethical writers. He does not seek to distinguish between the content of his ethical advice and theirs, but supports his own exhortations by relating them to what, on other grounds, his readers are already willing to acknowledge" (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, pp. 71-2).

1. To Will and To Do, pp. 43, 89, 92.

is able to warn the Church against what he regards as her greatest threat: accommodation to the modern world.[1]

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1. Ellul is very suspicious of the ways in which Christianity is distorted when Christian values are selectively employed and used for non-Christian purposes by the world. For example, he argues that the bourgeois world agrees with Christian morality at the point of family virtues, the dignity of the individual, and the importance of charity — but does so for the building up of a work ethic which contributes to the technological society (To Will and To Do, pp. 94-5). The bourgeois world recognizes Christian morality only insofar as it can be utilized to achieve secular goals (ibid., p. 94). He concludes, "The bourgeois morality, since it is not used for the glory of God but for the development of a certain type of society, is really a caricature of the Christian life and at bottom its worst deformation — this in spite of the fact that in its concrete works it exhibits many points of identity with the Christian morality ..." (ibid., p. 95). He accuses the bourgeoisie of having killed God by declaring man to be the beginning and end of everything (Métamorphose du Bourgeois (1967), pp. 19-20). He criticizes them for relativizing Christian truth, such as the belief that man is a sinner and the belief in the Incarnation, atonement, justification by grace, and Christ's resurrection. Ellul says that they annexed Christianity by attaching to it the bourgeois values of happiness and optimism (ibid., pp. 112-116). He claims that bourgeoisie denied the radical demands of the Sermon on the Mount as well as the call to love one's enemies. In short, he accuses them of eliminating everything scandalous from Christianity, that is, everything contrary to bourgeois ideology (ibid., pp. 116-118).

CHAPTER II

CHAPTER II

FREEDOM AS CHRISTOCENTRIC EXISTENCE

In Chapter One we have been dealing with Ellul's description of the human condition as that of bondage. In this and the next chapter we will focus our attention on the related issue of his understanding of how bondage can begin to be broken and freedom established.

Freedom as the Receipt of Grace

We will begin our discussion by considering freedom as the receipt of grace. That is, we will discuss Ellul's understanding of God's act of revelation as the granting of true human freedom.

Ellul believes that natural man is so enslaved to sin that of himself he is utterly incapable of hearing the Word of God. He agrees with Barth that only God's free Word of revelation can create the conditions necessary for the receipt of grace.[1] He believes that as man

1. Ellul's understanding of God's covenant with man is relevant at this point. He tells us that a covenant is first and foremost an act of divine mercy (Theological Foundation of Law, p. 50). He points out that "Berit, covenant, is formed from the same root as barah, to elect" (ibid., p. 50). Thus the covenant has to do with God's free act of grace whereby God chooses a partner (ibid., pp. 50, 53). He tells us that in God's covenant with man God judges and condemns man, but in so doing grants grace and pardon and restoration to man (ibid., p. 52). Though the covenant is a contract of loyalty between God and man, Ellul tells us that the Bible places the emphasis on God's initiative. It is God who establishes the conditions of the covenant. Man responds by endorsing that which God establishes (ibid., pp. 50-51). Ellul believes that the covenant of the Old Testament has been brought to fulfilment in Jesus Christ. He insists that it is only from the perspective of fulfilment in Christ that the nature of the covenant, as just outlined, can be truly understood (ibid., p. 56).

   Assumed in Ellul's position is a concept of God as the One who takes the initiative. God evokes faith and faith can be described as a gift of God (To Will and To Do, pp. 203, 303). "It is not because men choose/...

is granted this gift of revelation he is also granted the gift of freedom.[1] Thus when Ellul refers to freedom, he is not talking about autonomy (for autonomy is sin), but is referring to a "supernatural" possibility of obedience to God made possible by the event of revelation. Christian liberty is seen to be the God-given freedom to live in the power of God and the freedom to represent God before men.[2] Freedom, grace and obedience are seen to be words which have meaning only in interrelationship with each other. The ethical dilemma of the relationship of freedom to authority is overcome by redefining freedom as the freedom to obey God, rather than as the neutral freedom to choose between good and evil.[3] One might say that Ellul thinks out the concept of freedom with reference to the freedom of the Christian man and the freedom of the Christian man is thought out in terms of the freedom of

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choose Christ that they become Christians, it is because Christ has chosen them. It is not because Christians choose to go out into the world that they work there, it is because Christ sends them there" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 43). Freedom is not seen to be a characteristic of man's natural being, but a possibility which is a part of the gift of sonship and the task of prayer (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 121).

Karl Barth also connects freedom with prayer. He writes, "Prayer is literally the archetypal form of all human acts of freedom in the Church ... our freedom is only true freedom when the Holy Ghost intercedes for us to accomplish what out of our own resources we certainly cannot do" (Barth, I/2, p. 698).

1. "Le Sens de la Liberté," pp. 4-5.

2. Ibid., p. 5.

3. To Will and To Do, p. 84. In Ellul's understanding, true freedom is filled with the content of Christian love. He sees the two poles of the Christian life as being freedom and love; he insists that there cannot be any freedom without love and no love without freedom ("Le Sens de la Liberté," p. 7). Freedom is freedom for God and neighbour.

"In his Gifford Lectures, Bultmann contrasts the Renaissance-Enlightenment view that freedom is freedom from authority, with the traditional Christian view that freedom is always freedom under authority, and thus a freedom that is known only in obedience" (Thomas C. Oden, Radical Obedience (The Ethics of Rudolf Bultmann) (1964), p. 100, referring to Bultmann, History and Eschatology, pp. 14ff.)

the Christian God.[1]

Ellul's concept of freedom consistently relates to his understanding of the human condition. If sin is autonomy, then true freedom cannot be a neutral freedom but must be obedience to God's will. Citing Barth,[2] he concludes that disobedience to God is never a choice but is rather evidence of bondage to sin.[3] Ellul and Barth thus contrast natural ethics (based on human choice) with Christian ethics (based on life lived from God's grace).[4]

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1. The biblical basis for Ellul's thought at this point is his analysis of Pauline theology (see "Le Sens de la Liberté") and his appreciation of the theological truth of the Garden of Eden story (To Will and To Do, pp. 5-19, 271). (Gen. 2:8-17 understands man's true life as life lived from grace; freedom is not seen to be the neutral choice between good and evil.) He also cites John 15:5, "Apart from me you can do nothing," and concludes that freedom has to do with a relationship with Christ (To Will and To Do, p. 297). (Commenting on John 8:36 Bultmann writes (The Gospel of John, A Commentary, 1971, p. 440): "Jesus promises freedom; he alone can bestow it, and only that is genuine freedom.")

   Ellul tells us that he agrees with Barth that God's true commandment captures man in such a way that he cannot escape; the commandment "permits" man to live in obedience to God (To Will and To Do, pp. 86, 198, on p. 299 citing Church Dogmatics II/2, p. 564). "The commandment rests on the fact of man's liberation by Jesus Christ, on the fact that man becomes free through grace received in faith" (To Will and To Do, p. 87).

   Ellul also agrees with Bonhoeffer that when God reveals Himself, He gives us the freedom to obey, rather than the freedom to choose among various possibilities of which obedience is one. To the degree that we hear God's Word, we are free from the choice of disobedience. Disobedience (in the words of Barth) becomes the "impossible possibility" (To Will and To Do, p. 297; see also Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 220-221).

   Emil Brunner and Søren Kierkegaard also think of freedom in the context of obedience to God: see Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative (1947), pp. 58-59; Søren Kierkegaard, The Journals of Kierkegaard (1834-1854), edited and translated by Alexander Dru (1969), pp. 187-189.

2. II/2, p. 669.

3. Barth writes, "Is there a worse threat to freedom itself than the establishment of man as his own lord and lawgiver? Who can exercise a worse tyranny over us than the god in our own breast?" (I/2,p. 668). Barth believes that only the Son can make us free from the compulsion in which we live (Jn. 8:31ff.; Rom. 6:17,20-23; Rom. 7:17-20; Rom. 8:2): cf. II/2, pp. 586, 589.

4. To Will and To Do, pp. 297-298. Ellul agrees with Barth that the fact of the covenant in Jesus Christ eliminates the central concern of natural/...

Ellul seems to have quite correctly understood Barth's thought at this point and has based his own thinking mainly on Barth's biblical reflection. To deepen our perception of Ellul's position, it may be helpful to say more about Barth's position, extending our knowledge of Barth beyond Ellul's explicit references. We are not seeking to give an exhaustive description of Barth's thought at this point, but are looking to see the way some of Barth's statements legitimately expand what Ellul himself says, which in turn is based on Barth's thought.

Barth indeed does not set human freedom in antithesis to God's authority, but sees freedom as "freedom under the Word".[1] "Being a slave of Christ means being free."[2] He sharply distinguishes Christian freedom from mere creaturely freedom. Christian freedom is seen to rest on the free revelation of the Holy Spirit which enables man to participate in a new kind of freedom, freedom for God.[3] Though freedom and obedience are virtually synonymous terms for him,[4] we must remember that obedience is itself understood in the context of God's gift of revelation. God's command differs from all other commands because it is the free revelation of God which enables man to respond with obedience.[5]

Barth's way of understanding the Law as a form of the Gospel, God's gift as a form of God's gift of Himself, is closely based on Christology.

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natural ethics — the search for a criterion of good (To Will and To Do, pp. 249-250, 265). He says that the Christian ethic cannot offer an objective definition of the good (To Will and To Do, p. 265). "To conceive the existence of this ethic is by that very fact to assert that 'all independent search for the knowledge of good and evil is excluded' (Barth, II/2, p. 535). It can never be formulated as a way of being correct with God or of protecting ourselves from him" (To Will and To Do, p. 265).

1. Barth, I/2, p. 695.
2. Barth: Karl Barth's Table Talk, edited and recorded by John D. Godsey (1963), p. 37.
3. I/2, pp. 203ff.
4. III/4, p. 595.
5. II/2, p. 585.

He looks to Jesus Christ and to Jesus Christ alone to gain an understanding of true freedom. What he discovers when he looks to Christ is that obedience and freedom are not antithetical. Jesus was the truly free man because His life was lived in obedience to God. Barth accepts this definition of freedom as normative, thus calling into question the common assumption that freedom is the neutral choice between good and evil.[1]

In Barth's Christology, however, statements about Jesus are understood primarily as statements about God. From God's revelation in Jesus Christ we learn that God wills to make Himself responsible for man's life. In Christ, God here and now invites and enables man to live from God's own resources, rather than living in autonomy. The Law is a form of the Gospel because God makes demands only in the context of the bestowal of His Spirit, which enables those demands to be met. Grace is thus the answer to the ethical problem because grace sanctifies man and puts him under God's command. Grace is not merely the forgiveness of sin, but also God's enabling power which bestows new life.[2]

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1. Karl Barth, Community, State, and Church (1960), pp. 77-80; II/2, p. 605.

2. Barth II/2, pp. 511-516, 557, 560, 605. "The God who claims man makes Himself originally responsible for man. The fact that He gives man His command, that He subjects man to His command, means that He makes Himself responsible not only for its authority but also for its fulfilment. Therefore we do not speak completely about God Himself, if we do not go on at once to speak also about His command" (Barth II/2, p. 543). "The core of the matter is that God gives His command, that he gives Himself to be our Commander. God's command, God Himself, gives Himself to be known. And as He does so, He is heard. Man is made responsible (Barth II/2, p. 548).

Through independent study of Paul's concept of justification, Ernst Käsemann has reached conclusions which vindicate Barth's understanding of the Law as a form of the Gospel (see "'The Righteousness of God' in Paul" in New Testament Questions of Today (1969), pp. 168-182). Barth's stance is vindicated all the more because Käsemann makes no reference to him and does not appear to realize that he made a similar theological point much earlier (Barth did not make his theological point on the basis of an exegetical study of Paul's concept of justification and this may be the reason why Käsemann makes no reference to him). Writing of Paul's/...

Ellul's emphasis on the importance of a Christian style of life would be impossible were he to agree with the isolation of declaratory justification from sanctification. The shape of his ethic is decisively related to the biblical knowledge he has acquired from Karl Barth.

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of Paul's theology Käsemann says, "Paul knows no gift of God which does not convey both the obligation and the capacity to serve. A gift which is not authenticated in practice and passed on to others loses its specific content (New Testament Questions, p. 170). He describes the sense of Paul's imperative with the formula "'Abide by the Lord who has been given to you and by his lordship.' If a transformation of our existence is really effected ... this cannot help but mean a change of lordship. The new Lord cuts us off from what we were before and never allows us to remain what we are at any given time, for otherwise he might be the First Cause but he would not be our Lord in the true sense. In this particular theological context, man is never seen as free in the sense of autonomous. But he does receive — eschatologically — the possibility of choosing between the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of Satan ..." (ibid., p. 176). Käsemann is not denying the forensic nature of justification in Paul's thought; he is insisting that forensic justification cannot be isolated from God's gift of power without distorting Paul's thought (his assessment of Paul's thought has the effect of bringing Paul's theology into a more integral relationship with Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God).

In line with Käsemann's thought, Victor Paul Furnish writes, "The Pauline imperative is not just the result of the indicative but fully integral to it" (Theology and Ethics, p. 225). Furnish explains that the reason this is so is that in Paul's thought, justification has to do not only with forensic pardon but also with entering the new age and living under a new Lord (I Thess. 5:4ff.; Rom. 13:11ff.; Phil. 3:20) (Theology and Ethics, pp. 151-152, 225-226). Furnish's comments on Rom. 6:12ff. are reminiscent of Barth's defence of the reversal of the traditional Law-Gospel schema: "The Christian's obedience is inseparable from the event of God's grace which makes it possible. God's grace constitutes not just the summons to obedience but the possibility of obedience. Vs. 14 makes this clear when it speaks of sin's power being displaced by the power of grace ... The Christian already has a new life because he already has a new Lord ... The new Lord not only asks all, but gives all" (ibid., p. 195). "As always in Paul's thought, what God gives is inseparably tied to what he asks; where the command is heard, the power to obey is also received. This is most profoundly expressed in the famous appeal of Phil. 2:12-13 to 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for God is at work in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure' (RSV). This is what is meant by being 'led' by the Spirit (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:18) and by 'living' and 'walking' by the Spirit (Rom. 8:4-5; Gal. 5:16,25; cf. II Cor. 3:6). Belonging to Christ means being subject to his power in the double sense of one who is both dependent upon and responsible to a sovereign Lord" (Theology and Ethics, pp. 238-9).

J.A. Ziesler's study The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul (1972) is in line with Käsemann's interpretation that God's righteousness involves the gift of His power and presence which leads in the way of obedience/...

Freedom as Life in Christ

Ellul believes that the Christian ethic is distinguished from all other moralities by the phrase "in Christ":-[1]

> Everything derives from the fact that Jesus is God, that Jesus Christ is Lord and Savior ... Christian ethics is going to be the relation between the person of Jesus Christ and a person who takes him as his Savior and Lord. Here we are restored in the good which God says and does. Now the good is strictly impenetrable, incomprehensible, beyond our grasp from the standpoint of what man calls good. There is no comparison possible.[2]

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obedience (Ziesler, op. cit., pp. 13-14, 170-171). Ziesler makes this point on the basis of a painstakingly careful linguistic study. The main conclusion of the study is that for Paul the verb "justify" is used relationally, often meaning eschatological acquittal, but that the noun and adjective of the same word describe behaviour within such a relationship (ibid., pp. 1, 212). "Justification is entirely by grace through faith, it is declaratory, yet on the other hand, Paul's ethical seriousness is fully allowed for, within the one section of vocabulary." "Always, solely by God's grace is man forgiven, acquitted, restored to right relationship, but also made a new creature whose life is now righteous in Christ, really and observably" (ibid., p. 212). Ziesler insists that his conclusion supports the traditional Reformation doctrine that man's status before God is based entirely on grace and always remains so based. Man is never justified by works (ibid., p. 168). Because Christ is the source of the Christian's ethical life, the Christian can never claim any righteousness as his own. "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). However, Ziesler insists that justification has ethical consequences, precisely because it involves sharing in God's power (ibid., pp. 168-9).

1. To Will and To Do, pp. 285-6.

2. Ibid., p. 88; see also p. 75. Ellul is against separating ethics from theology and against putting ethics in the foreground: "It is the attempt to consider the fact, the phenomenon, the problem, the value of ethics in itself and preferentially which leads to all errors. What is needed, obviously, is to reduce ethics to its humble station and, consequently, to begin afresh with Christ and his work" (ibid., p. 306). He does not intend to devalue the importance of a Christian moral response to Jesus Christ. He does insist that the moral life of the Christian is a response to and a participation in Jesus Christ.
   Barth shares the same point of view. "What are we to do? We are to accept as right and to live as those who accept as right the fact that they do not belong to themselves, that they, therefore, do not have their life in their own hands and at their own disposal, that they are made a divine possession in Jesus Christ" (Barth, II/2, p. 580; see also p. 583). "'For me the good is to cleave to God.' Every ethic which is at least half serious, aims consciously or unconsciously to say this" (Barth, II/2, p. 552). Brunner also shares a similar point of view (Brunner, The Divine Imperative, pp. 55, 84, 86) as does Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer writes, "The point of departure for Christian ethics is not the reality of one's own self, or the reality of the world;/...

The title of Ellul's first volume of Christian ethics is called To Will and To Do. The title is taken from Phil 2:13 and that passage is quoted on the fly-page of the book: "'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure.' (KJV)."[1] Though he stresses the importance of visible "life-styles" and thinks that Christian faith should make a difference in outward life, he still puts decisive emphasis on the invisible basis of the Christian life in prayer. Prayer itself is seen to be an integral part of the Christian life-style and its most distinguishing feature.[2] Though outward works are seen to be important, Ellul believes that the Christian life can never be proved and certainly cannot be proved by outward works. "The same

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world; nor is it the reality of standards and values. It is the reality of God as He reveals Himself in Jesus Christ. It is fair to begin by demanding assent to this proposition of anyone who wishes to concern himself with the problem of Christian ethics" (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 56). "The problem of Christian ethics is the realization among God's creatures of the revelational reality of God in Christ, just as the problem of dogmatics is the truth of the revelational reality of God in Christ. The place which in all other ethics is occupied by the antithesis of 'should be' and 'is', idea and accomplishment, motive and performance, is occupied in Christian ethics by the relation of reality and realization, past and present, history and event (faith), or, to replace the equivocal concept with the unambiguous name, the relation of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. The question of good becomes the question of participation in the divine reality which is revealed in Christ" (ibid., p. 57). Bonhoeffer tells us that the Christian ethic does not ask the question "How can I be good? or "How can I do good?" Instead, it asks a totally different question: "What is the will of God?" This latter question, the question of Christian ethics, presupposes a decision of faith with reference to the reality of the living God (ibid., p. 55).

1. From the fly-page of To Will and To Do; see also p. 214 and The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 83.

2. Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 172-3. "Prayer goes with action, but it is prayer which is radical and decisive. Every action will necessarily be taken over by the milieu in which it occurs. It will be turned aside from its purpose. It will be vitiated by circumstances. It will entail unforeseeable consequences and will drag misfortune in its train. Prayer, on the other hand, when it is genuine, cannot be taken over (since it obtains its import and substance from God). It attains its goal. It entails the consequences granted by God" (ibid., p. 172).
Karl Barth also believed that prayer is the Christian's most important and effective activity (III/3, pp. 264-5).

acts, the same deliberations, the same decisions, which in factual objectivity are identical and ethically equivalent, do not have the same value nor the same meaning before God, according as they were or were not inspired by the Holy Spirit."[1] Since Ellul sees personal obedience to Christ as the Christian good,[2] he assumes that a life which is not lived "in Christ" cannot be pleasing to God, though particular acts of non-Christians may be indistinguishable from particular Christian acts.[3]

Ellul points out that most of the biblical texts having to do with morality address the covenant people: Israel and the Church.[4] Put differently, the good in the biblical sense has to do with God's speaking and man's listening and cannot be divorced from that context.[5] "Man only reflects the good that comes from God ... If Jesus says, 'You are the light of the world', it is <u>because</u> he says 'I am the light of the world.'"[6] Ellul agrees explicitly with Barth[7] that the Christian good is determined by whether or not God is active in our activity.[8] He also thinks that only the Holy Spirit can create the faculty for accomplishing the will of God.[9] Obedience must be man's immediate

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1. <u>To Will and To Do</u>, p. 214.
2. <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 25, 28, 83.
3. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 31.
4. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 20.
5. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 21. Barth writes, "Man does good in so far as he hears the Word of God and acts as a hearer of this Word. In this action as a hearer he is obedient. Why is obedience good? Because it derives from hearing, because it is the action of a hearer, namely, of the hearer of the Word of God. It is good because the divine address is good, because God Himself is good" (II/2, p. 546; see also p. 547).
6. <u>To Will and To Do</u>, p. 22.
7. Barth, III/4, p. 327.
8. <u>To Will and To Do</u>, p. 22. "What Paul says about our prayers goes even more for our works. If the Holy Spirit must be the interpreter of our poor prayers, our stammerings, before God, still more must he be the one to make worthy our unworthy works, to take them upon himself for God" (<u>ibid.</u>, p. 214).
9. <u>Ibid.</u>, pp. 34, 304.

response to the activity of the Holy Spirit. If obedience is put off until later, Ellul thinks that we no longer have the power to fulfil God's will, "for that power is tied to the presence itself of the Holy Spirit".[1]

Ellul is very much in the tradition of Barth's "actualism" even when he does not make explicit reference to Barth.[2] Ellul believes that the free grace of God can never be mastered or domesticated — not even by Christians. Even the Christian must ever and again receive God's grace which is "new every morning".[3] The Christian man is not ontologically changed in such a way that from his new nature he can speak God's Word to himself.[4] The Christian is set in covenant relationship with God, but God's speaking and man's listening must occur ever and again if the Christian is to remain a faithful covenant partner.[5]

The theological presuppositions assumed in this position are that man has radically fallen from grace, that God alone is good, and that man comes to know the good only in relationship to God. Key texts

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 213.

2. For example, Ellul says that even the Christian man does not have any intrinsic capacity to do God's will: "There is no permanent transformation of his being which would consist in this ability to perform the will of God by himself. He has no intrinsic possibility which would be self-sufficient and new and which would become a second nature" (To Will and To Do, p. 34; cf. The Politics of God, p. 134).
   What we mean by Barth's actualism is evidenced when Barth writes: "What I heard yesterday I must hear again to-day; and if I am to hear it afresh to-morrow, it must be revealed by the Father of Jesus, who is in heaven, and by Him only" (Barth, The Epistle to the Romans (1933), p. 98; see also Barth II/1, p. 235).

3. To Will and To Do, pp. 33-34.

4. Ibid., pp. 32-34.

5. "To be sure, a relationship can be restored; Barth [and Ellul] certainly would claim this as part of what Christ has done for men and the world. But man's rejection or acceptance of the new or restored relation is a matter, not of infused disposition or growing seeds, not a once-for-all conversion [though it assumes the latter]; it is problematic in each day and each moment. One can fall from the subjective apprehension of newness of life at any time; and this is the case" (James M. Gustafson, Christ and the Moral Life (1968), p. 115).

are --Mark 10:18, "No one is good but God alone," Rom. 14:23, "Whatever does not proceed from faith is sin," and Heb. 11:6, "Without faith it is impossible to please him /God/." Assumed is the "infinite qualitative difference" between sinful men and the Holy God. Because the discontinuity between man and God is emphasized it is seen to be continually necessary for God to speak and for man to listen. The Christian good is thus radically differentiated from any natural good one might come to know in the Christian home, Church, or in a "Christian civilization".[1]

In this tradition, the answer to the moral question is seen to have a great deal to do with prayer. What we ought to do is to live in daily openness to the spiritual impact of God, so that we may perceive the concrete shape of God's will for our daily lives. "Prayer comes before all the rest in the life in Christ ... All the rest of life in Christ flows from prayer. The whole ethic and behavior of Christians rests on the practice of prayer ..."[2]

Ellul attributes a priority to being over doing.[3] "According to God's will, it is not a question of doing good but of embodying faith, which is fundamentally different. It is not a matter of doing works but of 'bearing fruit'. The question of the fruit is really a question of the tree which bears it."[4] It's not that being and doing are set in antithesis in Ellul's covenant ethic, but that doing is seen to have its

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1. The latter can be forms of witness to God, but cannot take the place of God's free revelation (see To Will and To Do, p. 255).

2. Prayer and Modern Man, p. 116. "All further radicalism, of behaviour, of style of life and of action, can only have the prior rupture of prayer as its source" (ibid., p. 174). Søren Kierkegaard represents a similar view on the importance of prayer for ethics (Journals of Kierkegaard, p. 145). He understood the Christian life as based on a personal relationship with God (ibid., p. 222). Ellul has read Kierkegaard's journals (Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 111, 139), and hence may be influenced by him at this point.

3. To Will and To Do, p. 215.

4. Ibid., p. 217.

basis in Christian being (Christian being is itself understood in dynamic "actualistic" terms as already suggested).[1] He is not denying the importance of action, but is insisting that action must be the expression of faith. He agrees with Bonhoeffer that there must be a unity between being and doing.[2]

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1. "We do not mean to contend that this contrast is ontologically valid and permanent. We merely observe the fact that man in ethics looks for a deed, and that the gospels and the letters are talking, on the other hand, of a being, of a transformation of being, not moreover separated from the deed, but such that the deed comes second and as a consequence" (To Will and To Do, p. 275).

2. Ibid., p. 261, and on p. 309 citing Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 151ff., 166ff. Bonhoeffer writes, "For just as hearing must not be made independent of doing, so, too, doing must not make itself independent of hearing ... One thing is needful: not to hear or to do, but to do both in one, in other words to be and to continue in unity with Jesus Christ, to be directed toward Him, to receive word and deed from him ... Jesus recognized neither doing in itself, the busy activity of a Martha, nor hearing in itself. There is a false doing and a false hearing" (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 170). "To object that Christ, too, had this distinction between person and work in view in His saying about the good tree that brings forth good fruit (Matt. 7:17) is to distort the meaning of this saying of Jesus into its exact opposite. What is meant by this saying is not that first the person and then the work is good, but that only the two together are good or bad, in other words that the two together are to be understood as a single unit" (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 58). We must keep Bonhoeffer's words in mind if we are not to misunderstand Ellul when he writes, "What actually matters in practice is 'to be' and not 'to act'" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 90). "Revelation tells us that to be in the covenant of God is much less a matter of doing something than of being someone, and in reality of living by the grace of God" (To Will and To Do, p. 215). That these words are not to be interpreted as though doing is unimportant is indicated in the sentence which immediately follows the last one quoted: "Action, the bringing to pass of the good, the carrying out of some moral law ... has no value in itself" (ibid.). Works are seen by Ellul to have no independent significance, but a great deal of significance if they occur in the context of grace. He cites his agreement with Bonhoeffer, that the Christian life must be lived or it is nothing (ibid., p. 305). "Man can retain revelation only if he lives it. The word of God is grasped in the action performed, in the process of carrying it out" (ibid., p. 305). Because Christian action is the embodiment of faith, acts cannot be judged in isolation from the person committing the acts (ibid., p. 29). "The act is nothing but a sign of something deeper. It has no existence or content of itself ... The acts of the Pharisees, though 'good' were condemned by Jesus Christ because the inside was bad" (ibid., p. 217).

   Ellul also stresses the priority of thought to deeds, in the sense that deeds should be the expression of thought. He criticizes the modern tendency to isolate action from theological reflection. (However, he believes/...

Ellul thinks that the modern world values only acts:[1]

> Our world is entirely directed toward action ... People are always looking for slogans, programmes, ways of action; indeed, our world is so obsessed by activity, that it is in danger of losing its life ... A man who spends all his time in action, by that very fact ceases to live.[2]

"Precisely because our technological society is given over entirely to action, the person who retires to his room to pray is the true radical."[3]

Ellul is certainly stating a biblical theme which is desperately needed today in the field of Christian ethics. A superficial activism is a constant danger for those Christians particularly interested in ethics. This has always been a danger, as Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees indicates, but as Ellul suggests, this is a particular danger today — because we live in a society preoccupied with activity. In an age in which the Church is prone to let the world "write the agenda", Ellul reminds the Church of the importance of her own spiritual and reflective life. If indeed the Church is an eschatological community, she must continually pause so that she may be renewed by her transcendent Lord. Only as the Church seeks the mind of her Lord can she truly serve the Lord in the world.

Ellul also contributes to the Church's thinking at this point because he bridges the gap between "evangelical" and "liberal" Christianity. With the evangelicals he stresses the priority of man's relationship with God. With the liberals he believes in the importance of the command to love the neighbour in response to God's love. He does not

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believes that theological thought should itself be an aspect of Christian being and should not be based on an autonomous rationality) ("Chronique des Problèmes de Civilisation," Foi et Vie (Sept.-Oct. 1946), pp. 686-687). He criticizes the popular mood which expects the Church to be mainly concerned about the burning issues of the day and non-concerned about the content of her own belief in Christ (False Presence, pp. 92-93).

1. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 92-93; To Will and To Do, p. 28.
2. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 91.
3. Prayer and Modern Man, p. 174.

intend to isolate either love for God in a quietistic way nor love for the neighbour in a humanistic way.

Though Ellul is consciously dependent on Barth and Bonhoeffer in developing his ideas concerning the covenant basis of ethics, he is also equally close to some aspects of Rudolf Bultmann's thought, though he does not consciously depend on him at this point. What Ellul says of the priority of being over doing is what Bultmann means by "radical obedience". Radical obedience is the action of the Christian in which one participates in doing with one's whole being.[1] Bultmann affirms his own theology when he writes of Jesus' teaching:-

> Radical obedience exists only when a man inwardly assents to what is required of him, when the thing commanded is seen as intrinsically God's command; when the whole man stands behind what he does; or better, when the whole man is in what he does, when he is not doing something obediently, but is essentially obedient.[2]

Ellul is in agreement with the broad range of "Neo-Reformation" theologians at this point, in contrast to both more secular or humanistic theologians who divorce Christian doing from its covenant basis and also in contrast to a quietistic orthodoxy.

Freedom as Deliverance to the Captives

What we are going to discuss in this section builds on what we have just said concerning freedom as the receipt of grace and freedom as life in Christ. It also links with what we are going to say in Chapter Three concerning freedom as eschatological existence. Ellul has various ways of talking about the saving significance of Christ's relationship with man. Here he refers mainly to the present saving activity of the Holy Spirit which frees Christians from bondage to fatality and bondage to modern idols. Here he uses language which, though non-eschatological,

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1. Thomas C. Oden, Radical Obedience, p. 30.

2. Rudolf Bultmann, Jesus and the Word (1958), p. 77; see also his Existence and Faith (1960), p. 203. Also cf. Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, p. 145.

forms a consistent relationship with what he will say in the succeeding chapter in the language of eschatology.

We have earlier spoken of the ways in which Ellul understands the fact of separation from God as implying bondage to various social determinants. He believes that the continuing gift of revelation can enable a person to receive a degree of freedom from bondage to these forces.[1] He speaks of the gift of grace as God's power which enables Christians to begin the lifelong process in which God helps them to

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1. In Ellul's sociological works he can partially state his view of freedom without reference to the receipt of grace. Here he sounds like an existentialist, who sees man's actual state of existence as unauthentic and who sees authentic existence as involving a decision over against bondage to the general. "Man is indeed determined, but ... it is open to him to overcome necessity, and ... this act is freedom. Freedom is not static but dynamic, not a vested interest, but a prize continually to be won. The moment man stops and resigns himself, he becomes subject to determinism. He is most enslaved when he thinks he is comfortably settled in freedom" (The Technological Society, p. xxxiii; see also "Conformism and the Rationale of Technology," p. 98). Elsewhere in his sociological writings, it seems quite clear that he has little confidence that natural man can find the strength to surmount the various social determinants (see above, pp. 17-18). He tells us that he believes that no natural movement within this world can be truly revolutionary (The Technological Society, pp. 416ff.).

   Ellul is quite clear in his theological works that he affirms no hope of freedom apart from radical faith in Jesus Christ. He explicitly contradicts existentialism by saying that man by himself is not free to give a new meaning to his life (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 77; To Will and To Do, p. 169). "As I see it only the Christian faith (and no other belief or revolutionary stimulus) gives man sufficient hope to prompt him to embark on the undertaking I have described. If we are to question our society in so radical a fashion, we must adopt a point of view essentially different from society's — one that we can't arrive at by starting from our human wisdom" ("Between Chaos and Paralysis," p. 749). "No one, unless he is moved by a supra-human power, can consider himself truly revolutionary. All that belongs to this world has become radically conservative, and maintains the forces which inevitably lead toward suicide" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 58).

   Gabriel Vahanian writes, "For Ellul ... the chief characteristic of man is his ability to contest the way things are" (Katallagete, p. 17). Strictly speaking, this statement is a correct summary of Ellul's thought only if one adds that this is not a natural ability but a possibility acquired through the receipt of grace. Ellul writes, "To the Christian is given a freedom through which he (and he only!) can challenge all slaveries of whatever kind and escape them himself" ("Between Chaos and Paralysis," p. 750). Concerning natural man, one could/...

struggle in opposition to bondage to sociological patterns of conformity.[1] The gift of grace is no mere norm or idea, but the presence of Christ's power; but the presence of Christ's power leads man into a difficult struggle against his own sinfulness and bondage to the sinful ways of the world. At this point, we are not going to deal with Ellul's understanding of the difficulties involved in this process;[2] rather, we are going to examine his Christological convictions which lead him to believe that Christ is the resource adequate for the human dilemma. In the process of this examination, we will look at some of the areas of human existence where he believes Christ can and does grant freedom.

Ellul's reasoning about grace leading to freedom from captivity goes back to his reasoning about the Incarnation. He believes that the Incarnation involved a miraculous shattering of historical fatality. He so insists that the Incarnation was the once-and-for-all breaking of fatality that he affirms that our contemporary relationship to the Spirit must take the form of faith in this past activity of God.[3] He believes that true faith in the Incarnation means that the Risen Christ begins to grant us freedom from slavery to the powers He has defeated. Christ grants Christians a share in that freedom which overcomes historical necessity.[4] He believes that Christ can grant freedom with respect

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could just reverse Vahanian's statement and argue that Ellul sees natural man's chief characteristic as that of conformity to his social milieu!

1. "What Christ does for us is above all to make us free ... But to have true freedom is to escape necessity or, rather, to be free to struggle against necessity" (Violence, p. 127).

2. See below, pp. 77-82, where we will discuss Ellul's view that the attainment of Christian freedom involves an ongoing struggle.

3. The Politics of God, p. 186.

4. Ibid., p. 188. "The whole of Christ's work is a work of liberation — of our liberation from sin, death, concupiscence, fatality (and from ourselves) ..." (Violence, p. 129). "Man becomes free through the Spirit of God, through conversion and communion with the Lord" (ibid., p. 127). "We are no longer under fatality, we are free in Jesus/...

to such things as money, one's profession, the state, and public opinion. He believes that as Christ grants freedom with respect to these things, He begins to teach us how to use these things in the proper way — to glorify God.[1] Ellul tells us that Christ can grant freedom from obsession with politics and current events.[2] He claims that Christians actually can derive their inner and outer way of life from God, rather than from the world.[3] This means for Ellul that Christians can never swear absolute loyalty to nation, family, or any other human reality.[4] Through prayer, we encounter the power of God which contradicts ourselves, our milieu, and our past.[5]

Interrelated with Ellul's reasoning about the present saving activity of the Risen Christ and the meaning of faith in the Incarnation is what might be called "Christocentric monotheism". That is, he believes that Christ grants freedom from allegiance to other

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Jesus Christ" ("Vers un Nouvel Humanisme Politique," p. 21). In Gal. 1:4 Paul writes that Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age".

1. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," in Ellul et al., Appel aux Laïcs (1950), pp. 41-42.

2. This freedom comes "not because we might be more intelligent than others, nor because we may have a disinterested attitude toward politics, but because Christ is the Liberator. In him we are delivered from the pseudo-theater of current events and of political passion" (False Presence, p. 183). An obvious danger in this kind of soteriology is that Ellul runs the risk of giving his own non-biblical definition of that from which Christ grants freedom. Put differently, he may expand the New Testament definition of the powers defeated by Christ. Though elsewhere he gives an exegetical basis for his view that Christ frees us from political obsession (see below, pp. 261ff.), it would surely be impossible to provide an exegetical basis for the issue of gaining freedom from current events (Christians in biblical times weren't bothered by this problem because the means of mass communication did not exist). Ellul's procedure, though risky, may be biblically defensible. The Bible is not a law book for dealing in detail with all foreseeable problems. May it not be a part of the meaning of the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit (witnessed to in scripture) to free the Church even from problems not directly encountered in the Bible? Is it not the role of modern Christian prophets to suggest these very areas?

3. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 44-46.

4. Ibid.

5. Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 133, 145.

claimants to divinity, modern idols. He tells us that Paul not only spoke of freedom from the Jewish law, but also of freedom from any other Lord than Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:2).[1] He concludes that this means that Christ grants freedom with respect to all varieties of sociological, political and familial conformities, conformities relating to such things as the state, work, and money.[2] Ellul may have this kind of Christo-centric monotheism in mind when he attacks technology as a new area of the sacred.[3] Though in The Technological Society he does not mention the One to whom he owes ultimate allegiance, it is nevertheless the case that he attacks the new idols with a ruthlessness which implies a loyalty to the transcendent God. From Ellul's theological writings we know that this God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he has no hope that the general direction of the technological society can be changed,[4] he does apparently hold out some hope that Christ can free Christians from an idolatrous attachment to technique and thus can enable them to begin to make a break from the order of technological necessity.

Ellul's ethic is dedicated precisely to the effort of helping

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1. Dietrich Bonhoeffer has a line of reasoning which is very similar. He tells us that Christ has delivered us from an immediate relationship with the world and has brought us into an immediate relationship with Himself (Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship (1963), pp. 84-88). The meaning of our immediate relationship with Christ is that all other relationships must be reinterpreted in the light of this primary loyalty. "Wherever a group, be it large or small, prevents us from standing alone before Christ, wherever such a group raises a claim of immediacy it must be hated for the sake of Christ" (ibid., p. 86).

2. "Le Sens de la Liberté," p. 6.

3. The Technological Society, pp. 143-145. "The technician uses technique perhaps because it is his profession, but he does so with adoration because for him technique is the locus of the sacred" (ibid., p. 144). "The young snob speeds along at 100 m.p.h. in his Porsche. The technician contemplates with satisfaction the gradients of his charts, no matter what their reference is. For these men, technique is in every way sacred: it is the common expression of human power without which they would find themselves poor, alone, naked, and stripped of all pretentions" (ibid., p. 145).

4. See below, pp. 169-171 and fn.

Christians to become freed from the stifling pressure of conformity to this present civilization.[1] The Church's real relevance to the world is to introduce the transcendent possibility of freedom from slavery to the world:-

> The Church is there to proclaim and to bring them freedom. But if she is an agent of those forces, and shares in them herself, she cannot be for people at all. If she justifies the works of the world, she is in no position to witness, on people's behalf, to the justification in Christ. She becomes what she always tends to become: one of the powers of the world.[2]

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 59-60.
2. False Presence, p. 39.

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER III

FREEDOM AS ESCHATOLOGICAL EXISTENCE

In Chapter One, we sought to demonstrate that, in Ellul's understanding, man's lack of freedom is due to bondage to sin and to bondage to the sinful ways of the world. In Chapter Two, we began to explore his understanding of the way Christ grants freedom from bondage. Here we hope to show that freedom involves a detachment from the world made possible by an attachment to the Lord of the future Kingdom. If freedom begins with the receipt of grace and continues with life in Christ, both of these imply an allegiance to a Kingdom which is not of this world. Likewise, deliverance from captivity occurs because Christians have their true home elsewhere than in this sinful world.

The Otherness of the Christian Life

Ellul has several ways of talking of freedom as eschatological existence. At some places, he simply speaks of the "otherness" of the Christian life based on the "otherness" of the Christian God. Barth's early statement of his underlying conviction about God applies equally well to Ellul's thought.[1] Barth wrote in his preface to the second edition of his commentary on The Epistle to the Romans:-

1. Both Ellul and the later Barth see the Incarnation in more realistic terms than did Barth when he wrote this statement; Ellul and the later Barth see the Incarnation as a real event in past history. It is, nevertheless, the case that they have continued to stress the "otherness" of God in His continuing relationship with men. In this sense, Barth's early statement still expresses the thought of both men. (See our discussion of "actualism" on pp. 51-52.)

> If I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth." The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.[1]

One of Ellul's most frequent ways of referring to God is to use this language, calling God the "Wholly Other".[2] He tells us that man's relationship with God involves tension and confrontation precisely because God is Holy and man is sinful,[3] that is, because God is other than man: "It is precisely because it speaks of a Wholly Other that the revelation provides us with a point of view and a point of departure that are essentially different."[4] Ellul, like Barth, believes that the Christian life begins not with the awareness of a natural continuity between man and God, but with the revelation of God which calls man's life into question.

Though it might be argued that the early Barth never developed an ethic from the above insight, Ellul has proceeded to do precisely that. Ellul believes that the revelation of God not only calls man's life into question and then pronounces forgiveness; he also believes that the Christian's relationship with the "Wholly Other" leads to the "otherness" of the Christian life. This otherness from the world is due to the possibility of freedom from bondage to the sinful ways of

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1. Barth, Romans, Preface to the Second Edition, p. 10. Barth wrote of God, "His will is not a corrected continuation of our own. It approaches ours as a Wholly Other. There is nothing for our will except a basic re-creation. Not a reformation but a re-creation and re-growth" (Barth, The Word of God and the Word of Man (1957), p. 24).

2. Prayer and Modern Man, p. 174; Violence, p. 148; False Presence, p. 40; The Politics of God, pp. 141-2; "Between Chaos..." pp. 749-750.

3. Prayer and Modern Man, p. 133.

4. "Between Chaos and Paralysis," pp. 749-750; see also Violence, pp. 46, 148.

the world.[1] He believes that Christians can and should exist as "the incarnate presence of the Wholly Other". Christians are to live their lives by asking, "'How can we be the question that God puts to the world?'"[2] Ellul is quite careful in his formulation at this point: Christians are not simply to object to the world or to condemn it, but are to represent the Wholly Other; they are to witness to a transcendent possibility.[3]

On the basis of this reasoning concerning the otherness of the Christian God and the otherness of the Christian life, Ellul calls for a uniquely Christian presence in the world freed from conformity to the ways of the world.[4] In an age in which there is much popular talk about the Church existing in mission, Ellul, without disagreeing with the premise, reminds the Church that Christian mission is meaningless

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1. Ellul tells us that when the Word of God comes to us, it seems absurd because it is of a different order (The Politics of God, p. 30). "Our conversion does not consist in assimilating this Word so that it becomes reasonable. The absurd element persists, but from this moment what becomes absurd is the world, its wisdom, its intelligence, its power, its politics, its experience. For the foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of men" (ibid., p. 30).
   Though Ellul admits that the Church has not manifested the true freedom it should with reference to the world, he nevertheless argues that the Church has preserved a degree of freedom from the ways of the world ("Conformism and the Rationale of Technology," p. 101). "The Christian was encouraged to participate in the concerns of society but also to keep his critical faculties intact. Of course, from time to time, he has been subject to great social pressure to conform, but the fine balance between the positive and negative features in his attitude to society has never been destroyed. In other words, Christianity has guaranteed a form of freedom which, it seems to me, is worth preserving" (ibid., pp. 101-102).
2. The Politics of God, pp. 141-142.
3. False Presence, pp. 39-40.
4. Ibid., p. 40.

unless its content is determined by the Christian faith.[1]

> If the Church which is a mere association conformed to the propensities of the world, which is informed by the same ideas and prejudices, which follows the same sociological trends, is asked to be present to the world, that means nothing. It is merely a part of the world reuniting with the world.[2]

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1. False Presence, p. 85. Ellul tells us that whereas Protestants a century ago were preoccupied with man's interior life, they are today obsessed with social and economic problems "such as the world defines them, sees them and chooses to present them" (False Presence, pp. 48-9). He is not arguing that the Church should be devoid of concern about these matters, but that she should adopt her own angle of approach.

   One flaw in Ellul's reasoning in False Presence of the Kingdom is that he minimizes the pluralism actually present in the Church. Specifically, one wonders if there is not much more introspective preoccupation among rank and file Church members than he realizes! He sets out to assess the opinion of avant garde French Protestant intellectuals (False Presence, p. 5) and does a good job — but he forgets that the Church at large is not identical with her more intellectual leaders (nor for that matter is French Protestantism simply to be identified with Protestantism the world over!). The statement that we have quoted applies to French Protestantism generally; Ellul's research in False Presence of the Kingdom has to do entirely with the opinion of French Protestant intellectuals.

   It is interesting that only fifteen years ago Ellul was criticizing the Church on precisely the opposite score. In 1948 Ellul wrote, "The Church has left to others the responsibility for the spiritual life of the peoples. The Church has become introspective and has forgotten that the Gospel must be present in the midst of the people... The Church has restricted its work almost exclusively to individual witness and private conversion, and has left the nations of Europe to seek their spiritual food elsewhere" ("The Situation in Europe," Man's Disorder and God's Design, Vol. III (1948), p. 60). One wonders if the Church situation has so totally changed in the last fifteen years. Is not the problem of introspective preoccupation still a major feature of modern Christianity, though not the only one? May not the same modern Church be guilty of both errors which Ellul has described?

2. False Presence, p. 83. "The presence in the world supposes, first of all, a separation with respect to the world. It is because the Church is holy (that is, separated) that she is also sent. But if the Church is only a non-separated, sociological body ... neither is she sent, for that sending would be meaningless" (False Presence, p. 85). As this quotation shows, Ellul represents a modern emphasis on what has traditionally been called "sanctification", an emphasis which is all the more powerful because it is devoid of traditional jargon! He sets his sanctification theology in confrontation with modern secular theology, which is, of course, based on diametrically opposite premises.

   Ellul is a warrior against "cultural Christianity" every bit as much as were Barth and Kierkegaard, two of his notable teachers. He sees the whole trend of contemporary theology as a compromising of Christian truth for the sake of a cheap armistice with the world ("Mirror,"/...

Not only does Ellul apply his thought about the otherness of God to the Christian life, he also sounds an extremely practical warning concerning the missionary presence of laymen in the world. He argues for the urgency of theological training for laymen because he believes that mere Church attendance does not, in most cases, adequately prepare Christians for genuine missionary witness.[1] He believes

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("Mirror," pp. 203-4). He points out that secular theology is radical only with respect to God and that it is conformist with reference to society. He is puzzled as to why William Hamilton and Thomas Altizer speak of Christianity at all, since they are concerned only with philosophy, politics and social action. That is, all they are interested in is the world (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 147). He criticizes Tillich's theology of culture, Bultmann's demythologizing, and the death of God theology as all being forms of adaptation to modern man and society (Violence, pp. 146-7). "What I find very striking in such writings as those of Bultmann and Bonhoeffer is that God has once again become a passive object, in spite of the claims of these authors who are writing precisely to do battle against 'God as object'. One manipulates him according to the need of the moment" (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 149). Ellul comments on the later Bonhoeffer's belief that man has today "come of age". He tells us that this attitude is not new, but is what the Bible describes as human pride. He thinks that what is new today is the Christian effort to see in man's autonomy a dignity, rather than a state of sin. He thinks that this new Christian understanding is due to Christian conformity to secular society (Violence, pp. 40-1). Along similar lines, he criticizes Teilhard and Altizer for committing the error of seeing modern man as secular, rational, and mature. Ellul, quite to the contrary, regards modern man as the worshipper of idols: "Under the cover of this error, they reintegrate into their theology, precisely the religion of this time, of our society..." ("Les Religions Seculières", Foi et Vie (Nov. - Dec. 1970), p. 76).

Ellul's disagreement with secular Christianity is a part of his Christian disagreement with humanism. He accuses humanism of having a materialistic doctrine of man, being concerned only with man's sociological condition. He says that humanism is contemptuous of man's inner life, his moral and intellectual life (The Technological Society, p. 338). Ellul protests against the humanistic collapsing of the double love commandment into the mere love for our fellow-men. He also resents the secular-humanist Christology which sees Christ as present only in identification with our brothers, and not as also our transcendent Lord (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 87). He argues that prayer is not the encounter of man with man, as secular theology and humanism would have us believe. Rather, prayer is an encounter with God, which alone opens up the possibility of a truly human relationship with one's neighbour (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 129; see below, pp. 193-194).

1. "The fact that they are committed Protestants by background, that they have been confirmed after a sketchy instruction and more or less come to 'worship services' — those facts do not make them apt witnesses for Jesus Christ, nor do those experiences insure that their faith will/...

that unless Christians are disengaged from the world and theologically prepared, their engagement in the world will be "nothing but the empty pursuit of a fad".[1] He criticizes the tendency of Christians to think that the Church automatically contains the presence of the Wholly Other and, hence, that all that is needed is to be involved in the world. He stresses the importance of the Church's reflective and meditative life precisely because he believes that in the absence of this, Christians simply conform to the world.[2] In effect, Ellul, a layman, is saying that it is simply naïve to assume that most laymen have even a rudimentary understanding of the nature of the Christian faith (one wonders if he might not say the same thing about the clergy; Kierkegaard did). If in an earlier book he argued that the layman is the essential link in the Church's missionary strategy,[3] he is now arguing that the layman's presence in the world is a false one unless more effort goes into the theological and spiritual preparation needed for this calling. The mere bodily presence of laymen in the world means nothing.

In the World but not of the World

Ellul's reference to the otherness of the Christian life is his most vague way of describing Christian eschatological existence. Now we will begin to assess his more precise references to eschatology.

Though the centre of emphasis in Ellul's thought is on "realized eschatology" or "eschatology in the process of realization", he nevertheless believes in God's Kingdom beyond death and sees this belief as having moral significance for Christians.[4] Eschatological hope is for him closely

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will be strengthened (more often it founders) by the encounter with others, nor that they are fulfilling a genuine mission" (False Presence, pp. 85-86).

1. Ibid., p. 86.
2. Ibid., pp. 83-86.
3. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 19.
4. "The Christian is essentially a man who lives in expectation. This expectation is directed towards the return of the Lord who accompanies the end of time, the Judgment, and proclaims the Kingdom of God" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 49).

related to social realism.[1] He believes that it is only through a hope reaching beyond history that one can have the boldness to criticize and call into question the very ground on which one walks, the sociological patterns of conformity by which we live.[2] Ellul's eschatology provides the theological rationale for his lifelong task of criticizing the commonplaces of the modern world.[3] He believes

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1. Ellul is convinced that only Christians can be truly realistic, only Christians can see the frightening reality of the world -- because they have a hope which transcends history (Violence, p. 81). He is also convinced that Jesus was realistic. Though Jesus offered His life for men, He knew the nature of man and took this into account (John 2:24-5) (Violence, p. 84).

2. "In order to bear up under the utter harshness of our situation, we must have a hope beyond it; for without such a hope this world would be too tragic. And that is why Christians, possessing the hope of the resurrection and the kingdom of God, ought to be the only ones to carry out this decisive task for society" ("Between Chaos and Paralysis," p. 750; "Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien," p. 172).

3. See especially A Critique of the New Commonplaces, though that work is really but a drawing together of social criticisms scattered throughout Ellul's other sociological works, most notably The Technological Society.

I am happy to note my essential agreement with a statement by Vernard Eller related to Ellul's theology (V. Eller, "Four Who Remember," Katallagete: Be Reconciled III (Spring 1971), pp. 6-12). I agree that Ellul's social criticisms can only be understood in the context of his belief in the relevance of the future Kingdom for life today. It is indeed this eschatological perspective which explains the radicalism of his social critique and his freedom from ideological bondage. I agree that it is, at least in part, Ellul's eschatological perspective which enables him to take a critical stance with reference to various fads and trends. I most definitely agree that it is his rather straightforward reading of the Bible, and especially his reading of the New Testament, which leads him to his understanding of the transcendence of God and the moral significance of a Christian relationship with this transcendent God (ibid., pp. 8-9). What Ellul discovers through the Bible is indeed "an order of reality that is 'not of this world'". He does not find "simply a different method of conceptualizing the human phenomena with which mankind is familiar (which is about as much as most contemporary theologians undertake to do)". For him, the Gospel indeed points to "that which is truly new and not merely to a new arrangement of the old" (ibid., p. 9). Perhaps the most significant feature of the Eller article is the clear implication that if Ellul is to be understood at all, we must realize that here we are confronted by a modern Christian prophet!

My only criticism of Eller's article does not have to do with its substance, but with Ellul's intellectual ancestry. Eller makes no mention of the influence of Barth on Ellul's thought (this may be explained by the fact that the article deals explicitly with the parallels between Kierkegaard, Blumhardt, Ellul and Muggeridge). Eller mentions the influence of Christoph Blumhardt. Ellul quotes Barth frequently, and yet never once have I seen a reference to Blumhardt. I agree that there are similarities between Blumhardt's thought and Ellul's at some points, but I wonder if these similarities are not due to the influence of Blumhardt on Barth who, in turn, influenced Ellul.

that genuine eschatological hope leads the Christian to be discontented with every existing society.[1] Specifically, he thinks that Christian hope should free Christians from bondage to ideological illusions, the false consolations of human idealisms.[2] For Ellul, eschatological hope has to do with the establishment of Christian courage to withstand the evils of the world and to embody a higher standard; it has nothing to do with a confidence that world history is improving.

"Futuristic" and "realized" eschatology are for Ellul integral aspects of one belief. In his understanding, eternal hope is itself based on realized faith, not on the absence of such faith or on a philosophy of non-fulfilment in the present.[3] Eschatological existence means that Christians can begin to live in accordance with the will of the transcendent God.[4] Christians have the unique responsibility of

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1. "We must examine everything, question everything, in the light of the kingdom. We may never stop and say, 'Now justice is established, now we have set up a valid society in which we can peaceably await the coming of the Lord.' Every advance realized in Church and society must immediately be analyzed, criticized, measured by the kingdom yardstick. The kingdom demands nothing less than radical change " (Violence, pp. 44-5).

2. "Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien," pp. 173-4, 180. For additional material related to Ellul's opposition to human ideologies and for Reinhold Niebuhr's similar opposition see below, pp. 214-215.

3. The Politics of God, pp. 136-7. See Jürgen Moltmann, Theology of Hope (1967), pp. 18 and 22, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jesus — God and Man (1968), p. 28, for a totally different understanding of hope based on faith's non-fulfilment in the present. Moltmann and Pannenberg parallel secular theology at this point.

4. "To be a revolutionary is to judge the world...in the name of a truth which does not yet exist (but which is coming) — and it is to do so, because we believe this truth to be more genuine and more real than the reality which surrounds us. Consequently it means bringing the future into the present as an explosive force. ...It means understanding the present in the light of the future, dominating it by the future... Henceforth the revolutionary act forms part of history: it is going to create history, by inflecting it towards this future..." (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 50-51).

   Ellul's words about hope sound similar to those of the modern theologian of hope Jürgen Moltmann; in reality, Ellul's position is quite different. Ellul connects his theology of hope with a realistic and even pessimistic view of human history. Our hope enables us to live amid an intolerable world situation with a degree of detachment and with standards derived from elsewhere. His theology of/...

of hope is entirely opposed to Moltmann's tendency to give approval to various human trends. Ellul sees very little meaning to human history in the sense of an optimistic confidence about the improvability of the world. He admits that without the belief in the eschatological Kingdom "history is an outbreak of madness" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 50). In short, Ellul's theology of hope is related to New Testament eschatological thought and social realism. Moltmann seems to base his approach on the possibilities involved in a merger between Marxist and biblical eschatology (see Moltmann, Religion, Revolution, and the Future (1969); see also Theology of Hope, p. 25). Ellul regards any such merger as utopian, unbiblical, and the exact opposite of his intention. The future is brought into the present in Ellul's view by the life and witness of Christians who live from the coming Kingdom (Violence, p. 44) and not by secular forces. The only element Ellul and Moltmann have in common is that they both see hope as a way of establishing a critical stance over against the status quo (Moltmann, Theology of Hope, pp. 21-22, 41). Ellul thinks (quite to the contrary of much popular belief) that to believe in the coming Kingdom means to be freed from bondage to the past (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 49). He coined the phrase "revolutionary Christianity" to apply to this Christian eschatological existence (ibid., p. 51).

Ellul's eschatological understanding is perhaps even closer to the Old Testament understanding of hope than is Moltmann's Marxist reinterpretation of Old Testament eschatology. As Walther Zimmerli has argued, Old Testament hope has to do with the free gift and promise of God and is not at all to be confused with human world views (Walther Zimmerli, Man and His Hope in the Old Testament (1971), pp. 24-5). Thus, hope can be present even in the midst of political hopelessness (ibid., pp. 90-3, citing Hos. 5:13-14 and Hos. 2:14ff.). "Hope hopes in God, the God whose freedom men do not take away by hoping, no matter how immovably certain they are of the promise of God to his own, no matter how they cling to that promise. It is upon this foundation that the hope of the apocalyptic writer rests" (ibid., p. 150). In the Old Testament, hope is seen to be a transcendent reality, a function of man's relationship to God, capable of being present amid human hopelessness. "Hope cannot seriously be spoken of as though it were a possibility humanly inspired or produced. But the place where man encounters his creator and Lord is where hope lies" (ibid., p. 42). Commenting critically on Ernst Bloch's understanding of hope (which, of course, forms the philosophical base of Moltmann's position) Zimmerli summarizes: "Our look through the Old Testament statements considered in the previous chapters led repeatedly and with surprising persistence to one central point from which all statements about hope proceeded. It became clear that it was precisely where man was led to the edge of human hopelessness that every look turned away from man and his immanent possibilities. There was at no place a 'principle of hope' that was generally held or believed by man, no existential hope to be discovered in the existential understanding of man or in his understanding of his world. Rather it became clear that it was precisely where the sharpest criticisms of hope were loudest, that man in a frightening recklessness threw himself upon the one he was conscious of as coming to his people, or in the broadest meaning, to his creation" (ibid., p. 161). Zimmerli's insights, if correct, block the way for any Marxist reinterpretation of Old Testament hope. One is forced to choose/...

manifesting the coming Kingdom in their own persons.[1]

The Exegetical Basis

Ellul's eschatological understanding is itself a restatement of the New Testament view eloquently summarized in the Letter to Diognetus. The author of that letter referred to Christians as those who "live in the world, but are not of the world".[2] Ellul states his agreement with this theological point of view when he insists that the Christian must think of himself in the literal sense as belonging to two cities. The Christian's life setting is the same as everyone else's, but his thought and action are not to be determined by the world in which he lives.[3] "If the Christian is necessarily in the world, he is not of it. This means that his thought, his life, and his heart are not controlled by the world, and do not depend upon the world, for they belong to another Master."[4] One of Ellul's favourite and most frequently quoted passages of Scripture is the Pauline statement of this position:- "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).[5] He tells us that his interpretation of the Christian life is an application of Mtt. 6:33,"'Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness...'"[6]

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choose between a theocentric understanding of hope and a humanistic one. In each instance the word "hope" has a totally different meaning.

1. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 50-51. "He has to carry into the actual world of the present day elements which belong to the eschaton. In so doing he fulfils a prophetic function..." (ibid., p. 50).

2. Diog. VI. 3, cited in Oscar Cullmann's Jesus and the Revolutionaries, p. 60.

3. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 44-45.

4. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 7; see also Violence, p. 26.

5. Cited in Presence of the Kingdom, p. 97; Prayer, p. 145; Ellul also cites II Pet. 1:13, Heb. 11:13 and II Cor. 5:20 in Presence of the Kingdom, p. 45.

6. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 95.

He also bases his position on other New Testament passages, such as Heb. 11:13 (Christians as "'strangers and exiles'"), John 15:19, Mtt. 10:16,[1] and particularly John 18:36 ("'My kingship is not of this world'").[2]

Ellul is self-consciously cutting against the grain of popular secular theology in his emphasis on the Christian as "in the world but not of the world". However controversial such an emphasis may be in terms of popular theological taste, this position is based squarely on an accurate understanding of New Testament theology, particularly Johannine and Pauline theology.[3]

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1. Protestantisme Français, p. 147.

2. False Presence, p. 114.

3. One can cite additional texts to the ones referred to by Ellul. I Peter 2:11 is certainly similar to Heb. 11:13. Phil. 3:20 is perhaps the most convincing text of all:- "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ." Heb. 13:14 makes the same point:- "For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come." I Jn. 5:19 emphasizes the otherness of the Christian life in a radical way:- "We know we are of God, and the whole world is in the power of the evil one." Likewise, Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as the one who in delivering us from our sins delivers us "from the present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). That such diverse texts can be quoted to support Ellul's position shows that what he says is no peripheral aspect of New Testament thought, but at the centre of early Christian faith.

Victor Paul Furnish's assessment of Paul's theology is in decisive agreement with Ellul's thought at this point (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, pp. 127, 134, 214-216). Commenting on II Cor. 5:17 and 6:2 Furnish says that Paul's eschatology does not "just mean that salvation which will be fulfilled in the future has been initiated in the present. Rather, Paul's thought at this point is genuinely dialectical. ... The salvation which is already present is not, therefore, somehow qualitatively preliminary or second-rate. What is given is present in its fulness (although there is still something not given — namely resurrection from the dead and the final cosmic triumph of God's power over death)" (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, p. 215). The appeal not to be 'conformed to this age' [Rom.] (12:2) presupposes the believer's belonging to another age in which, through faith, he already participates. ... The exhortations are not designed for some 'interim' before the future comes; they are rooted precisely in the future as it is already present to faith, though still hidden within this age" (ibid., p. 216). What Furnish has said agrees with Ellul's basing of hope on realized faith and not on a philosophy of present non-fulfilment.

Ellul's exegetical basis is also related to Bultmann's exposition of/...

Detachment from the World's Values

Ellul is consciously dependent on Bultmann's interpretation of Johannine and Pauline theology for his thought about the Christian as in the world but not of the world. Ellul writes:-

> This presence of the eschaton means that we are free with respect to the world but committed to the kingdom of heaven. The life of the Christian is necessarily a life of "the end of the ages". It is already located at a critical distance from the world. This insertion into the kingdom leads to an "unworlding" (Bultmann).[1]

He agrees with Bultmann that Christian freedom from the world begins with an inner detachment from the values of the world, "a smashing of all human standards and evaluations", "desecularization".[2] Ellul tells us that we must stand at a distance from the tendencies and movements of society.[3] He, like Bultmann, believes that Christians must have freedom of thought (I Cor. 7:23) and, like him, he believes that this

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of the Fourth Gospel, but since this exposition already has to do with the applied meaning of Ellul's thought, we have included it under the following heading.

1. To Will and To Do, p. 222.

2. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 2, p. 76. Bultmann continues, "It is in this sense that the believer is no longer 'of the world' (Jn. 15:19; 17:14, 16); i.e. since the world is no longer his determining origin ... But their not being 'of the world' must not be confused with a retreat out of the world. Jesus prays the Father: 'I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil' (Jn. 17:15). As God sent him into the world, so he sends his own into the world (Jn. 17:18) not out of it" (Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 2, p. 76).

3. Violence, p. 26. Ellul believes that the Church should serve men, but be the servant of Christ alone (False Presence, p. 198). He rejects the notion that the Church should be "converted" to the world. By this, he means that the Church must serve the world, not in terms of the world's demands, but in terms of what loyalty to Christ requires (False Presence, pp. 38-9). That is, the Church cannot serve the world in a Christian sense if she conforms to the world's values.

can come only as man knows himself confronted by God.[1]

A central hermeneutical principle in Bultmann's ethic is that one must not sever "'the unity of the eschatological and the ethical proclamation'".[2] "The ethical radicalizes the eschatological. The eschatological provides the context for the ethical."[3]

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 93. Bultmann sees faith as related to the surrender of worldly security and the empowering of the Christian to live by the strength of the invisible world (Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 2, p. 75). "It means accepting completely different standards as to what is to be called death and what life. It means accepting the life that Jesus gives and is (/Jn./ 5:19ff.; 11:25ff.) — a life that to the world's point of view cannot even be proved to exist" (ibid., Vol. 2, p. 75). "Faith is itself desecularization — detachment within the world from the world. Or better: faith as the act of believing constantly brings about this desecularization" (ibid., Vol. 2, p. 86; see also Vol. 1, pp. 22, 343; This World and Beyond, p. 117; Existence and Faith, p. 260). Bultmann's favourite passage from which he develops his idea of "desecularization" is I Cor. 7:29-31 (Theology of the New Testament, Vol. 1, p. 351; Existence and Faith, p. 260). Christians are to participate in the world as though they did not do so, with "eschatological reserve", a distancing from the values of the world.

   In Bultmann's commentary on John, he relates the Christian's eschatological freedom to Christology: "As the origin and essential nature of the Revealer, to whom the community owes its existence, does not lie in the world, neither does that of the community itself" (Bultmann, John, p. 508). Victor Paul Furnish writes in words reminiscent of Bultmann's when he says, "Paul's Christology ... has a thoroughly eschatological orientation. In Pauline thought, Jesus is a figure in history, but not of history. That is, Jesus' 'historicity' is seen as derivative from his primary role as God's emissary to 'the world'"(Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, p. 162). Likewise, one can argue that the Christian life, based on a relationship with Christ, takes on the same pattern.

   Kierkegaard, of course, also affirmed the belief that the Christian is to be "in the world but not of the world": "Christianity is a kingdom which is not of this world. Yet it wants to have a place in this world — and there is the paradox and the conflict, it wants to have a place, but again not as a kingdom of this world" (Kierkegaard, The Last Years (Journals 1852-1855), ed. and transl. R.G. Smith (1968), p. 222).

2. Thomas C. Oden, Radical Obedience, p. 26, citing Bultmann, Theologie des Neuen Testaments, pp. 19, 327ff., 544-47.

3. Ibid., p. 26.

> This eschatological consciousness carries with it an implicit imperative, which summons men to live now in terms of God's coming reign. It calls men to answer an absolute either/or: either to order their lives in terms of God's new order, or to cling to their former outmoded self-understanding. [1]

Ellul, like Bultmann, thinks of the "otherworldliness" of the Christian life in part in terms of the inner reality of the Christian's relationship with God. The Christian does not seek first of all to change the outward form of civilization, but strives to live in the power of the transcendent Kingdom and strives to manifest this reality in life.

> Evidently a change of this kind will lead indirectly to very deep political or economic changes, but it does not inevitably lead to a direct conflict with authority, unless the latter champions the disorder which exists, and openly challenges the truth of God with regard to a new order. [2]

It would be an incorrect interpretation of Ellul's thought if we were to conclude that he understands man's inner life as divorced from his outward conduct. He accepts Barth's "One Kingdom" reasoning, and thus is much less willing than is Bultmann to accept such an inner-outer dichotomy (see below, pp. 88-89). It is, nevertheless, the case that he thinks that man's inner attitude is very important and that the Christian revelation has decisively (though not exclusively!) to do with the human heart.

Ellul thinks that man's inner distancing from the world relativizes human action and this interpretation is in agreement with the applied meaning of Bultmann's theology.[3] For example, Ellul thinks one

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1. Oden, Radical Obedience, p. 26. One can see that what Bultmann and Ellul are doing is restating their indicative--imperative (Gospel--Law) understanding in the language of eschatology.

2. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 44.

3. See the numerous sermons to this effect in This World and Beyond. In a personal letter to this writer dated Jan. 2, 1972, Ellul has said that he very much likes Bultmann's sermons (the implication being that he agrees with their essential content). He says that what he disagrees with in Bultmann is his philosophy and the relationship he establishes between philosophy and theology. (Ellul cannot accept/...

important meaning of prayer is that it helps to free us from the bondage of preoccupation with our own works,[1] "Prayer", "inner distancing", "desecularization", these are ways of describing the Christian belief that man is not justified by any of his own works, but by God's free grace, received ever anew.[2] He and Bultmann share

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accept the non-historical bias of existentialism and the demythologizing or de-historicizing of the Gospel which this philosophy entails.)

1. Ellul writes, "Action really receives its character from prayer. Prayer is what attests the finitude of action and frees it from its dramatic and tragic aspects. Since it shows that action is not final, it brings to it humor and reserve. Otherwise we would be tempted to take it with dreadful seriousness. But in so doing prayer bestows upon action its greatest authenticity. It rescues action from activism, and it rescues the individual from bewilderment and despair in his action. It prevents him from being engulfed in panic when his action fails, and from being drawn into activism, when he is incited to more and more activity in pursuit of success, to the point of losing himself. Prayer, because it is the warrant, the expression of my finitude, always teaches me that I must be more than my action, that I must live with my action, and even that my action must be lived by another in his action. Thanks to prayer, I can see the truth about myself and my action, in hope and not in despair" (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 172; for a similar point with reference to Christian humour see False Presence, pp. 210-211).

2. Meaning of the City, pp. 125, 181; Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 16, 118. The doctrine of justification by faith relativizes not only human works in general, but man's vocational activity in particular. Ellul writes, "Whatever work is undertaken by man does not reveal its meaning or its value save in Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 123). Our work is not holy in itself (Meaning of the City, p. 145), but only as it is an aspect of our relationship to Jesus Christ. "Outside Christ, there is absolutely no way for man's work to be elevated. Outside of Christ, the vanity of Ecclesiastes is fully true ... Outside of Christ, all goes back to nothingness" (Meaning of the City, p. 177; see also A Critique, pp. 149-158).

Bultmann also applies the traditional doctrine of justification by faith to the issue of work and likewise affirms that God frees us from "absorption" in our work (Bultmann, This World and Beyond, pp. 29-30, 137-8). Like Ellul, he states that life receives its true meaning only from what takes place in the inner man. The meaningfulness of work is established at the same point where the meaningfulness of life is established (ibid., pp. 85-88).

Karl Barth also stressed the belief that work is not inherently meaningful but becomes so when life is lived in and from God's grace (Barth, III/4, pp. 53-4; Theology and Church, p. 349; see also Charles C. West, Communism and the Theologians, pp. 208-240).

It must be admitted that at some places Ellul has such a negative understanding of work that it is hard to see how work can become a channel/...

this common Reformation faith. To argue, as Ellul does, that Christian prayer and humour relativize human action does not mean that human action is unimportant. It does mean that the free and

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channel through which Christians are enabled to witness to Christ. At some places his thinking seems to fall into a kind of "Two Kingdom" reasoning, whereby it is seen as impossible to have one's vocation influenced by one's Christian understanding ("Work and Calling," pp. 13-14). However, at other points (as above) he seems to admit that one's vocation can become an avenue for Christian witness, though this is seen as possible only because one has discovered styles of free Christian involvement outside the confines of one's technical vocation (ibid., pp. 14-16). We need to consider the basis for that aspect of his thought where he seems to utterly negate the possibility of using vocations to witness for Christ.

He argues that the Bible sees work as little more than the "travail" necessary for survival (ibid., pp. 8, 13; A Critique, p. 150). "In spite of the two or three biblical texts counselling work, it must not be forgotten that the stream of theological opinion was that work was a mark of condemnation, a sign of our fallen nature ..." (To Will and To Do, p. 195). To make this point he has to overlook a most important text. Is it of so little significance that when the Bible described what it regarded as the ideal state of human existence (the Garden of Eden), it described a state of affairs which included work (Gen. 2:15)? Related to his biblical tendency to overstate the meaninglessness of work is his overdrawn sociological thesis that the modern world is hopelessly in bondage to technique, so much so that there is little likelihood that Christian freedom can come to expression through vocational channels ("Work and Calling," p. 13). He also seems to us to overstate his case by implying that all work is merely a variation of assembly-line boredom (ibid., pp. 11-12). He fails to see the extent to which much work even today remains an avenue of self-fulfilment. We also think that in some vocations it is far easier to witness for Christ than he imagines, since many vocations directly involve caring for people. The fact that some degree of technique is involved does not seem to us to disprove the point that genuine caring for people does occur, though to Ellul it does seem to do just that (ibid., p. 13).

We think that Christian conviction can and should modify the way people go about vocational tasks, encouraging them to seek to be fair, just, honest, etc. We also think that even in assembly-line jobs, Christians should be encouraged to try to establish human relationships with fellow-workmen and in so doing to manifest Christian concern. In the tradition of Ellul's own "One Kingdom" reasoning, we side with that aspect of his thought where he encourages Christians to attempt to remain faithful to Christ at all points in their lives, however difficult such a task may be. While agreeing that the Bible does not identify vocational work with Christian calling (which is to witness to Christ, not to earn an income) ("Work and Calling," p. 8), we believe that every effort should be made to introduce the latter into the context of the former. While agreeing with Ellul's critique of the bourgeois tendency to see work as itself capable of establishing meaning in life (A Critique, pp. 152-3), we think that he at some places over-reacts and fails to see that Christians, who know meaning in Christ, can and should attempt to have this meaning influence their vocations.

sovereign God stands in a creative and judging relationship to man's works. The burden of the world does not rest on man's shoulders. Man can go about his work freed from the anxiety of having to establish his status before God on the basis of his works.

Agonistic Existence Illustrated With Reference to the City

Ellul applies his eschatological faith to the issue of modern urban life. He believes that Christ does not call us to leave the city, but that He does call us to an inner and outer detachment from the values of the city.[1] Though the Christian lives in the midst of the technological society, the urban-industrial-commercialized-materialistic world, Christ can grant freedom from the acquisitive-status values of this world:-

> Christ introduces a kind of break between man and his world... Never again can he enter the city with the same spirit, the same strength, the same submission, the same destiny. No longer does man belong to the city, exactly as he no longer belongs to the crowd, because his individuality has been affirmed by his encounter with Jesus Christ ... The Spirit of the city no longer dominates him, because Jesus Christ has vanquished this spirit.[2]

Christ enables us to live as those for whom the twentieth century has been "demythologized". Of course, we still live in this twentieth-century urban-technological world, but we live as those whose true home is elsewhere.

Eliul's statements about eschatological existence and about detachment from the values of the world and the city, in particular, might seem a bit optimistic. One might get the impression that he is affirming that conversion brings a simple and immediate deliverance from bondage to the sinful ways of the world. It must be admitted that Ellul

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1. Meaning of the City, pp. 132-3.
2. Ibid., p. 132.

does have the writing habit of stating his points and then considerably later introducing qualifications; yet, in fairness to him, we must recognize the qualification which he does offer here, a qualification which protects his thought against the charge just mentioned.[1]

When Ellul talks of being freed from the values of the city, he also admits that this is no simple once-and-for-all achievement, but a daily struggle. In the tradition of "actualism", he sees freedom as a continuing task, based on the continuing gift of grace. This is so not only because God is free, but also because man is so radically sinful that he must continually struggle in opposition to his own sinfulness and his bondage to the sinfulness of the world.[2]

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1. If Ellul believes that Christian existence has to do with living out an obedience to the future Kingdom, he nevertheless believes that this involves a genuine effort and struggle. We are to seek first the Kingdom of God (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 95; see Mtt. 6:33). Conversion does not make an eschatological way of life easy or automatic. He admits that certain biblical passages might give the impression that after conversion the Christian life is "rosy, there are no more problems, one is automatically in tune with God's will, one obeys without effort ..." (Jonah, p. 71; see also False Presence, p. 84). He, however, cannot agree with this interpretation of the Christian life and cites Paul and other biblical sources to the contrary (Jonah, p. 72; To Will and To Do, p. 31).
   Victor Paul Furnish writes of Paul's eschatology: "'God's transcendent power' has already broken in. Man does not, precisely stated, stand 'between' the ages, but at the point where they interpenetrate" (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, p. 134). Ellul's eschatological understanding is in line with this statement, and this statement shows the reason why seeking to be obedient to the Kingdom of God involves an agonizing struggle: the Christian still participates in the old age (marked by sin) though he knows the power of the new age (grace).

2. Ellul tells us that the receipt of grace plunges man's life into the agony of a conflict with his sinful self and the sinful ways of the world (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 46). "It is because Christian faith and hope are manifesting themselves in a life that life is henceforth plunged into contradiction" (To Will and To Do, pp. 98-99). "The heart of this ethic may be expressed thus: it is based on an 'agonistic' way of life; that is to say, the Christian life is always an 'agony' (Gk: a contest. wrestling), that is, a final decisive conflict; thus it means the constant and actual presence in our hearts of the two elements of judgment and of grace. But it is this very fact which ensures our liberty. We are free, because at every moment in our lives we are both judged and pardoned, and are consequently placed in a new situation, free from fatalism, from the bondage of sinful habits" (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 20-21).
   Ellul/...

Because man is and remains a sinner, freedom in Christ means the freedom to struggle against sin and sin's effects, rather than a once-and-for-all conquest of sin.[1] For example, when Ellul describes Israel's relationship to the city, he tells us that Israel continually had to struggle, living out the conflict between the sinful ways of the city and the power of grace.[2] He is not trying to encourage a Christian schizophrenia; he is trying to be perfectly frank about the difficult nature of Christian discipleship.

Ellul is much too much of a realist about human sinfulness to think that the receipt of grace makes discipleship easy. He is decisively in the Reformation tradition in his emphasis on the radical sinfulness of even converted Christians (To Will and To Do, p. 33). He appeals to Paul's understanding of the continuing conflict between sin and grace as representing the essential biblical description of the Christian life. He tells us that there is only a holy and a not holy and that God regards all men as not holy (ibid., p. 31). "Let us avoid such a terribly simplistic notion as a clear separation between good men and evil men, right and wrong. The judgement of God is not separation of good and evil, but annihilation and re-creation" (Meaning of the City, p. 73). In spite of all the contrast Ellul sees between the Christian and the non-Christian, nevertheless the decisive contrast he sees is between God and all men! "We have no right to replace God, to make ourselves judges of the world's sin" (ibid., p. 74; see also To Will and To Do, p. 32).

Ellul does not deny that a restored relationship with Christ can and should bring moral renewal ("Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 159-160). Nor is he claiming that there are not degrees of Christian existence (see Phil. 1:9-11). He argues, for example, that there are Christian brothers who are weak in faith and those who are more mature (False Presence, p. 84). (He does not seem to be denying the Wesleyan insight that there can be growth in the Christian life.) What he is saying is that all men, even converted Christians, naturally tend to live in separation from God. If there is growth in the Christian life, it is based on man's continuing responsiveness to grace, whereby he more and more lives in and from God's power, rather than from his own resources. (Thus, Ellul is close to Luther's understanding of sanctification as the daily struggle to live under the influence of grace.) He writes of the Christian, "He does not act by progressive approximations to a fixed perfection, but in a decision which is total and new at each moment ... There is no adding yesterday's work to today's. There is only the renewal of one's being by the increase of faith through the power of the Holy Spirit who works in us" (To Will and To Do, p. 83).

1. Notice the qualification in the second part of the following statement: "To have true freedom is to escape necessity or, rather, to be free to struggle against necessity " (Violence, p. 127).

2. Meaning of the City, p. 41.

For Ellul, the basic reason that the Christian life is a struggle, an "agony", is because the converted Christian is still a sinner.[1] The struggle comes because the Christian knows the conflict of grace against sin. Through the daily receipt of grace, he can live in the power of the new age, but the power of the new age collides with the sinful ways of the old age. The Christian life is precisely this collision, this "agony". The Christian life cannot be understood in static terms, but only in terms of a dynamic teleology. The Christian must daily move from sin to grace and because the Christian remains a sinner, there is no theoretical solution to this problem. The only solution is the practical one of life lived in daily repentance, a daily turning away from bondage to freedom.[2]

Another reason that the Christian life is seen by Ellul to involve a struggle is that it has to do with God's grace calling for concrete obedience in the particularities of each Christian's life,[3] obedience which is terribly difficult and humanly impossible.[4] Each hour of the Christian life is to be regarded as the last hour, the hour in which the either-or decision of obedience to Christ is called for amid the clash of life.

A final reason that the Christian life is seen to involve "agony"

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 13; Violence, p. 138.

2. Ellul generalizes from the problem facing Israel, with reference to the values of the city, to the problem facing all men, with reference to sin. He writes, "Such is the problem for every man who wants to live by the grace of Christ. And what seems both tragic and disconcerting is that there seems to be no theoretical solution to satisfy this problem. There is no theological demonstration for one to follow. The answer comes with life, day by day, in the conflict between the world's necessity and the liberty given us of God, between the world's wisdom (which we can never totally set aside) and the folly of the cross (which we can never totally live out)" (Meaning of the City, p. 41; see also Protestantisme Français, pp. 147-148).

3. To Will and To Do, pp. 97-98.

4. Ibid., p. 267.

is that a distancing from the world's values does not involve geographical separation from the world. Ellul calls the Christian to place himself at the point where the will of God clashes with the suicidal ways of the world.[1] For example, he has a very pessimistic understanding of the city, but his response to the problem is the exact opposite of what one would expect. He calls the Church to assume its preaching task in the city[2] (and preaching for Ellul involves both words and deeds). If Christians gain a degree of freedom from the values of the world, this is for the sake of serving Christ in the world.[3] Hence, the Christian life is plunged into "agony", struggle.

Ellul's exposition of "agonistic existence" protects his thought from two charges. Against the charge of perfectionism, he insists that the problem of sin still plagues the Christian. Freedom is less a once-and-for-all deliverance from the power of sin and more the continuing preparation for a daily battle in which there are tremendous dangers and real risks. Likewise, his description of agonistic existence protects his thought from the charge of quietism or "cheap grace". Though he is aware of the difficult nature of the Christian life, he is not prepared to compromise the absolute claim of God on the Christian's life nor will he grant an acceptable status to man's sinfulness.[4] If the Christian lives his life at the overlap of the two ages, he is nevertheless called and empowered to live from the future Kingdom. Christ introduces freedom from bondage to the sinful ways of the world, and Christians are called to live in and from this freedom.

If the receipt of grace does not immediately transpose one to

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 27. "Our concern should be to place ourselves at the very point where this suicidal desire is most active, in the actual form it adopts, and see how God's will of preservation can act in this given situation"(ibid., p. 28).
2. Meaning of the City, pp. 76, 83.
3. Protestantisme Français, pp. 147-148.
4. Jonah, p. 72.

heaven, neither does it invite one to remain in the far country of human disobedience. Rather, grace leads man into a daily dynamic struggle to move from disobedience to faithfulness.

Before concluding this section of our chapter, we need to note that Ellul's understanding of agonistic existence also relates to his "dual morality". We earlier spoke of dual morality in terms of an agreement between Christians and non-Christians at the level of particular acts.[1] We pointed out there that he believes that non-Christian acts can sometimes be in agreement with faithful Christian acts. At those points, the Christian can join the non-Christian in good conscience, in obedience to God.

When Ellul speaks of dual morality in connection with agonistic existence, he is thinking of an overlap between Christian conduct and human morality which is due to the Christian's sinfulness. Here the Christian is seen as sharing in human morality, not because he ought to, but because he is all too much in bondage to sin, as are men generally. When he speaks of dual morality in this sense, he speaks of Christians living between the claims of two moralities (the morality of the world and obedience to Christ), rather than speaking of living in direct obedience to Christ.[2] When he describes dual morality in this way, he simply seems to be repeating what he says about agonistic existence. He emphasizes the difficult life-struggle to be obedient, rather than pointing but that the Christian is called to be obedient at all points.[3] Ellul is not denying that man is called to be obedient at all points, but is describing how very difficult is this task.[4] He is not seeking

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1. See above, pp. 36-41.
2. To Will and To Do, pp. 109-110, 290.
3. To Will and To Do, pp.108-109; Presence of the Kingdom, p. 46.
4. If the Christian chooses to participate in politics in the normal sense of the word, Ellul believes that he is faced with the impossibility of being obedient to God in his political vocation (this/...

to give a status to sin, but is calling Christians to a frank confession of their sin and a strenuous effort to deal with it.[1]

Christian Ends-Means Reasoning

What we are going to discuss here is Ellul's restatement of his eschatological understanding in the language of ends and means. The connection with his eschatological and Christological thought is vital, since his reasoning is based on the unification of means and ends "realized" in Jesus Christ. He believes that in Jesus Christ the goal of salvation and the methods of salvation were harmoniously unified. The means utilized were the realized presence of the ends sought.[2]

Stressing the realized nature of eschatology in Jesus Christ, Ellul even says, "The end, this Kingdom, which will 'come' at the end of time, is already present when the divine means (the only, unique Mediator) is present."[3]

(this due to the autonomous nature of politics and the relativity of all political choices). Ellul apparently sees such a situation as more tragic than the Christian's general situation in the face of the world (see below, pp. 299-300). However, at one place his general social thought evidences the same problem. He privatizes love to such an extent that he utterly divorces it from public service (see below pp. 197-208).

1. The distinction we have just drawn in terms of Ellul's two-sided understanding of dual morality is our distinction, not his. The justification for drawing this distinction is based on the fact that he speaks of a Christian agreement with non-Christian acts in both a positive and a negative sense.

2. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 79. Ellul bases his position not only on his general eschatological understanding, but also on an exegesis of Jesus' temptation story in particular. He points out that Jesus refused to use non-godly means even to attain worthy ends (The Politics of God, p. 114; False Presence, pp. 41-42). He also describes his position with reference to Rom. 12:17-21, the overcoming of evil by the methods of good. He tells us that he regards this Pauline passage as a generalization of the meaning of the Sermon on the Mount (Violence, p. 172).

   His position is also based on a study of II Kings (The Politics of God, p. 116).

3. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 79.

> When Jesus Christ is present the Kingdom has "come upon" us. This formula expresses very precisely the relation between the end and the means. Jesus Christ in his Incarnation appears as God's means, for the salvation of men and for the establishment of the Kingdom of God, but where Jesus Christ is, there also is this salvation and this kingdom.[1]

Ellul likewise calls for those who live in Christ to share in this reunification of means and ends which is possible through eschatological existence. He writes, "We are invited to take part in a dialectic, to be in the world but not of it, and thus to seek out a particular, and specifically Christian position."[2] Though other ethicists may apply eschatological thought differently, he uses his understanding to support the cause of radical obedience to God, decisively opposing a softening of God's severe demands.[3]

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 79.

2. Violence, p. 26.

3. Ellul believes that the radical demands of the Gospel and the Sermon on the Mount must not be "toned down" (Violence, pp. 146, 172), but he also believes that the Sermon on the Mount is not to be understood as a law, a code, or a set of rules (ibid., p. 168). He is too influenced by Barth to understand the moral teachings of the Bible in a legalistic way. He is convinced, however, that the moral teachings of the Bible are quite authoritative and hence are more than mere symbols. He thus disagrees with the antinomianism implicit in J.A.T. Robinson's position (ibid., pp. 167-168). Ellul agrees with the rigorism of Tertullian and Tolstoy, but not with their literalism or legalism, nor with their belief that Jesus is primarily a lawgiver (see H. Richard Niebuhr, Christ and Culture, pp. 52, 59).

Ellul agrees with Reinhold Niebuhr (An Interpretation of Christian Ethics) that the validity of an ethic has to do with the tension which it sets up between the transcendent and the historic (To Will and To Do, p. 310). He agrees that revelation demands an impossible absolute (ibid., pp. 260, 267). Revelation leads to demands which are contrary to natural man (ibid., p. 221). "Christianity complicates dreadfully the situation of the person trying to answer ethical questions, because it places man in a last situation. Surely the commandment of Jesus is inapplicable. His ethic has nothing to do with the immediate moral problems bearing on the relativity of the arrangements to be sought in economics or politics, or of balances of power to be stabilized" (ibid., p. 266). Ellul accepts Niebuhr's exegesis of the teachings of Jesus (see Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, pp. 43-62), but, unlike Niebuhr, he is resolved to strive to live out directly the requirements of Jesus rather than compromising them for the sake of having a pragmatic influence on the world. Yet he is fully aware that humanly speaking Jesus' demands are impossibly difficult — hence only God Himself can enable Christians to begin to realize Jesus' way. "It is not a matter of finding a middle road, nor of setting up distinctions and compromises/....

Though he knows that the Christian life is difficult and in the final analysis unattainable, he nevertheless calls Christians to uncompromising obedience; he stresses the uniqueness of the Christian life. He writes, "We must remember that the Christian must not act in exactly the same way as everyone else. He has a part to play in this world which no one else can possibly fulfil."[1] He argues that the Church must live as an "unassimilated foreign body in our society". He tells us that "it is only through complete refusal to compromise with the forms and forces of our society that we can find the right orientation and recover the hope of human freedom."[2]

Ellul believes that Christians are to represent the unification of means and ends established in Jesus Christ.[3] The means which Christians are to use must be a consistent reflection of their loyalty to Christ.[4] "Christians are not in the same situation as others with regard to the end: they have received this end in themselves by the grace of God. They are to represent before the world this unity between end and means, authorized by Jesus Christ."[5] Noble Christian purposes

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compromises so that the 'extraordinary' demands of Jesus might become ordinary. Now that is just the temptation of almost all those who have developed an ethic, and even of Niebuhr, when he makes love a principle and a commandment which remains an impossibility as well as a possibility" (To Will and To Do, pp. 266-267). "In a word, this ethic is not applicable or inapplicable. It is both at the same time, for considered solely at the human level it is without logic, foundation, or meaning. Considered as the life in Christ, the 'whether' no longer comes to mind for the applicability is no longer our responsibility" (To Will and To Do, p. 267; see below, p. 136 et seq., n. 2).

1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 8; see also p. 24; To Will and To Do, pp. 85-86; Violence, pp. 26, 45-46, 69-70, 142.

2. "Mirror," p. 203.

3. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 80.

4. Ibid., p. 95.

5. Ibid., p. 80. So far as the Church and all its members are God's 'means' they ought to constitute that presence of the 'end' which is characteristic of the Kingdom" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 80). "What is in the service of Jesus Christ receives its character and effectiveness from Jesus Christ" (Propaganda, p. 231).

do not justify immoral practices; the end does not justify the means. Rather, "Means corrupt ends."[1] He believes that to reason that the end justifies the means is fundamentally contrary to God's revelation in Jesus Christ. To reveal the future Kingdom of love and peace, God utilized the methods of sacrificial and self-giving love: Christ on a Cross. If the Christian's sole task is to witness to this Christ, then he must seek to embody Christ's way of life.[2]

An example of an application of Ellul's non-compromising approach is his advice to young people. He warns young people against compromising their convictions for the sake of climbing a status ladder. He thinks that by the time they have reached anywhere near the top they will have compromised the convictions with which they began and hence will have become different people.[3] Translated into specifically

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1. A Critique, p. 302.

2. He harshly criticizes Sartre's glorification of compromise (A Critique, pp. 38-48). Contrary to existentialism, he argues that the only responsible human attitude is the sincere effort not to compromise (A Critique, p. 45). In particular, he says that people should not accept compromise in an a priori way, excusing themselves ahead of time (A Critique, pp. 43-44). He recognizes that it is difficult to "keep one's hands clean", but he feels that the necessity of compromising should not be glorified by being given theoretical justification. If (because of man's sinfulness) "'evil eventually creeps in'", it is never to be accepted, tolerated, or justified (A Critique, p. 45). While addressing a mainly non-Christian readership (in A Critique of the New Commonplaces), he urges the consideration of a non-compromising effort to be faithful to the highest that one knows. In effect, he is saying that seeking to uphold ideals and sometimes having to compromise them is preferable to having no ideals at all. Likewise, when he elsewhere addresses Christians, he tells them to seek first the Kingdom of God (which involves a different dynamic than the merely human effort to approximate ideals), but warns them that this is not easy (see above, pp. 77-82). In neither the humanistic nor the Christian case is Ellul trying to encourage compromise; in both cases he is being frank about the difficulties involved in a non-compromising approach.

3. A Critique, pp. 280ff.

Christian terms, he is warning Christians against sacrificing radical obedience today for the sake of some more effective opportunity tomorrow.

Ellul makes a similar point in opposition to political expediency:-

> The politicians spend all the todays telling us that in all the tomorrows we shall be free to engage in morality. They even threaten to allow us to engage in morality in all the tomorrows only if in exchange we allow them to engage in politics in all the todays. We formally refuse to submit to this perpetual blackmail. We must save all the minutes without exception, one after the other, if, as we must, we want to save all the time which pragmatically makes up our whole life.[1]

From his general understanding of New Testament eschatology, from his study of Jesus' temptation story, the Sermon on the Mount, Rom. 12:17-21, and from his study of II Kings (to mention only the obvious sources), Ellul concludes that Christianity must be decisively concerned about the integrity of the methods used, rather than being primarily concerned with the attainment of goals, even goals judged worthy by God.[2] He believes that unchristian methods distract from the Christian goal, because the Christian goal has to do with embodying an integrity of life. He believes that, if the central motivation for the Christian life is that of love, then love must not lead to acts contrary to love.[3]

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1. A Critique, pp. 301-302.

2. "Théologie Dogmatique," p. 147. We are always tempted to think that all means are good once they are subjected to the will of God (inwardly) or oriented to the end that God seeks. We fail to see that this always amounts to the fallacy that 'the end justifies the means', and we justify ourselves hypocritically by invoking the dictum that 'to the pure all things are pure.' In fact, as these stories [in II Kings] have progressively shown, the choice of means is our great responsibility" (The Politics of God, p. 116).

3. "Théologie Dogmatique," p. 146.

Christian "Styles of Life"

Ellul's lifelong defence of the importance of Christian "styles of life" is the application of his ends-means reasoning and the expression of his belief that the Christian life should conform to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.[1] He writes of his understanding of Christian

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 81, 146. Ellul shares with Kierkegaard this concern for a Christian style of life, though he does not explicitly mention him in this regard and though Kierkegaard did not use these exact words. Kierkegaard believed that a Christian teacher must furnish guarantees of his teaching by his own life-witness (Kierkegaard, Attack Upon 'Christendom' (1854-1855), pp. 172, 271). He spoke of the importance of a correspondence between Christian speech and life, belief and conduct (ibid., p. 209; Journals, pp. 98, 174, 204, 207, 223). His famous distinction between an "admirer" and a "follower" is that a follower strives to be what he admires, while an admirer fails to realize that the object of admiration makes a claim (Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 234). Kierkegaard accused the Lutheran Church of Denmark of the apostacy of "playing at Christianity" (The Last Years, p. 48). Playing at Christianity, the failure of one's life to embody one's belief, is precisely what Ellul is attacking in his emphasis on life-styles. In the light of the fact that Ellul speaks highly of Kierkegaard and explicitly refers to his Journals, it is likely that he has been influenced by him at this point (Ellul, "Between Chaos and Paralysis", p. 749; To Will and To Do, p. 260; Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 111, 139).

Kierkegaard also opposed Christian involvement in politics because he believed that politics is based on cleverness and denies the importance of "reduplication", the living out of one's faith (Kierkegaard, The Last Years, p. 217; Journals, p. 204). "Politics consists of never venturing more than is possible at any moment, never going beyond what is humanly probable. In Christianity, if there is no venturing farther out, beyond what is probable, God is absolutely not with us..." (The Last Years, p. 162). Ellul is similarly suspicious of politics, as we see in Ch. VII (pp. 250ff).

Like Ellul, Kierkegaard's central teaching was that the Christian must seek first the Kingdom of God (Kierkegaard, Attack Upon 'Christendom', p. 210; The Last Years, p. 142). Like Ellul, he was critical of the worldliness of the Church (The Last Years, p. 167; Journals, pp. 130-131). He resented and dedicated his life to resisting the lowering of the standard of what it means to be a Christian (The Last Years, pp. 47, 154). Kierkegaard, though in near pathological form, affirmed the ascetic aspect of New Testament teaching (Journals, pp. 213, 240). He wrote, "The fault with the middle ages was not the monastery and asceticism, but that basically the world had won because the monk paraded as the extraordinary Christian" (The Last Years, p. 66). He also criticized medieval asceticism because the Christian ideal was not embodied in the world, but was "situationless" (The Last Years, p. 269; see below, pp. 192-193).

styles of life in a way which reflects his Barthian "One Kingdom" reasoning:-

> Now, as its name indicates, the whole of life is concerned in this search. It includes the way we think about present political questions, as well as our way of practicing hospitality. It also affects the way we dress and the food we eat ... as well as the way in which we manage our financial affairs. It includes being faithful to one's wife as well as being accessible to one's neighbour. It includes the position one ought to take on current social and political questions, as well as the decisions which relate to the personal employment of our time. I could multiply these examples, which are mere suggestions, to show that absolutely everything, the smallest details which we regard as indifferent, ought to be questioned, placed in the light of faith, examined from the point of view of the glory of God.[1]

Ellul says that faithfulness to revelation can become a reality in daily life only as Christians recover this "missing link":-

> To speak quite frankly, without beating about the bush, a doctrine only has power (apart from that which God gives it) to the extent in which it creates a style of life, to the extent in which it is adopted, believed, and accepted by men who have a style of life which is in harmony with it.[2]

He points out that Christians today are frequently virtuous, they do

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 148. Ellul, in conscious agreement with Barth (Barth, II/2, pp. 535 and 610, cited on p. 275 of To Will and To Do), tells us that there are not indifferent actions nor autonomous domains of activity. All of life is to be subjected in obedience to Christ -- not just man's inner being (To Will and To Do, pp. 29-30; see also False Presence, p. 177; "Théologie Dogmatique," p. 146). He tells us that to argue that nothing matters but the interior life is to engage in the very hypocrisy condemned by Jesus Christ (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 14). "Especially, let us not say that there are two distinct domains: God's and Caesar's; for example, the spiritual for God and the temporal for Caesar. The kingdom of God, the whole Bible ceaselessly tells us, is universal, total, unlimited, without exception" ("Rappels et Réflexions," p. 165). Ellul quotes I Cor. 10:31, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (To Will and To Do, p. 29). He cites his agreement with Barth on the trinitarian basis of this "One Kingdom" reasoning. Both men believe that there is only one will of the Creator and that will can be determined only by reference to God's revelation in Jesus Christ (To Will and To Do, p. 73). Man at all points is claimed by the God revealed in Christ. For a seeming contradiction by Ellul of his own point see below, pp. 197-208, 299-300.

2. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 145.

their jobs well, but their pattern of life is imposed on them by their social environment: "It is not their spiritual condition which affects their style of life: It is their political and economic condition, and from this point of view, they are an overwhelming demonstration of the truth, temporary and temporal, of Marxism."[1]

He believes that unless Christians can begin to express their Christian convictions in life, the Church in the West will simply continue to be integrated into the world and will continue to die.[2]

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 146; see also False Presence, p. 45.

"There is no life-style, either individual or collective, which is showing forth the Christian faith. The Protestant lives like everyone else, works like everyone else, thinks like everyone else and reacts like everyone else" (False Presence, p. 46). "The fact is that for a long time the Church has been nothing but an artificial gathering of essentially worldly people, which brings 'the world' into the Church (without, unfortunately, bringing in people!). ... Christians who are conformed to the world introduce into the Church the value-judgments and concepts of the world. They believe in action. They want efficiency. They give first place to economics, and they think that all means are good (for the spread of the Church, goes without saying!). They are defined by their sociological milieu. The Protestant thinks to adopt the means which the world employs. Since he finds those means useful in his profession, or in his leisure time, they stand so high in his estimation that he cannot see why he should not introduce them into the Church and make the things of the spirit dependent upon them. He never faces the problem of these means. They are there. They are effective. Hence they are good. Since they are in a sanctified world and are effective, why not make use of them in the Church? The criteria of his thinking as a Christian are so vague, and the demands of his faith are so 'inward,' that he is unaware of any contradiction between the world's means and the life of faith. One adopts television or radio without hesitation, without questioning the psychological effects of these devices, or the validity of the witness borne through these media. Such concerns carry little weight where there is assurance of efficiency and utility" (False Presence, pp. 47-48). Ellul admires the Puritans for their willingness to stand up and be counted. He thinks that modern Protestantism has rejected Puritanism only to choose mere conformity to the world (False Presence, pp. 45-46). He asks whether the reason Puritanism has been rejected is that "after all, not everyone has the courage to wear a salvation army uniform" (False Presence, p. 46; see also The Politics of God, p. 106).

2. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 146-147.

Ellul's words about the importance of Christian life-styles fit consistently into the general pattern of his ethic. He argues for the importance of a visible side to the Christian life because he believes that the Christian life should be the unique embodiment of and witness to the Gospel.[1] He believes that the inner and outer aspects

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1. Ellul's belief that the Church must utilize methods consistent with her Gospel is applied in his rejection of the Church's right to use methods of propaganda. He sees propaganda as involving the psychological manipulation of the subconscious for the purposes of changing outward behaviour (The Technological Society, pp. 363-375; "The Obstacles to Communication Arising from Propaganda Habits", Student World, p. 402). He writes, "Propaganda is not the defense of an idea but the manipulation of the mob's subconscious" (The Technological Society, p. 373). He thinks that propaganda (and he means propaganda in this sense of the word) must not be used by the Church because it is inconsistent with the very nature of the Christian Gospel: "What happens is that the church will be able to move the masses and convert thousands of people to its ideology. But this ideology will no longer be Christianity" (Propaganda, p. 230). The Church can indeed acquire an influence in the world through the utilization of the methods of the world, but in so doing she ceases to be the Church of God and becomes merely another sociological organization (Propaganda, pp. 230-231). (Ellul's words, of course, could have a far-reaching effect on the Church's style of evangelism.)

   He does admit that the Church may use the mass media to transmit worship services (Propaganda, p. 231), or for the purposes of giving documentary information ("Rapports Presentés Par M. Ellul," in Eglise Réformée de France Evangélisation Information, No. 1 (January-February 1968), p. 85). He apparently thinks that such a use of the media can occur without using propaganda, though he doesn't think that it can be really popular or successful on a widespread basis.

   In order to understand Ellul's position here, we need to say a few more words about his understanding of propaganda. He thinks that propaganda has disastrous effects no matter who uses it and for what purpose (Propaganda, pp. xiv - xv). Some of the effects are these: the suppression of the critical faculty by the creation of collective passions, the creation of an easy conscience with respect to whole areas of life, the establishment of a new sphere of the sacred outside criticism, the creation of predispositions to act in certain ways, and the establishment of an abstract "verbal universe" (The Technological Society, pp. 369-371).

   Ellul describes the phenomenon of propaganda as being in large part based on the fact that there is an enormous gap between what people say they believe and their actual practice (Propaganda, pp. 27, 179-180; A Critique, pp. 200-201). Propaganda exerts a lever to change people's behaviour, while leaving the content of their thought intact (Propaganda, pp. 27-28, 207-208). He admits that Church members also dissociate their Christianity from their behaviour and are thus easily manipulated by propaganda (Propaganda, pp. 201, 228-229; Presence of the Kingdom, p. 145). He writes of the Church, "It is true that the Spirit should have given us up long/...

of the Christian life should manifest a quality of faithfulness to Christ. He is not saying that all Christian acts must be absolutely different from non-Christian acts.[1] He is arguing that the outward shape of the Christian life should be the consistent reflection of obedience to Christ. All Christian lives need not be outwardly similar;[2] each Christian life should in its own unique way express

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long ago, so invariably do we fall for propaganda" (Violence, p. 155).

As yet Ellul has not dealt with the way in which the resources of the Christian faith can protect Christians from the disastrous effects of propaganda (Ethics of Freedom will probably deal with this issue). Even so, from his general ethical position and from what he says about propaganda, we can make our own deductions. If the Church could begin to live the Christian faith to which she claims belief, this would be a factor working to minimize the effect of propaganda on Christians — because the gap between thought and practice would begin to be closed. Of course, many other things would be needed to overcome this gap, such as the recovery of a sense of history, to overcome modern man's tendency to live only in the present (Propaganda, pp. 43ff.). A sense of true community would also be needed to overcome a basis of propaganda's appeal: the lonely individual isolated in the mass (Propaganda, pp. 8-9). Also, the individual would need to feel so strong in his convictions that he would not feel the need to be a "normal" member of a mass society (Propaganda, p. 49; "Obstacles to Communication," p. 402). Though popular Christianity may not be capable of meeting these problems, a more serious Christian commitment, along the lines proposed by Ellul, surely could.

1. See above, pp. 36-41.

2. To Will and To Do, p. 219. Ellul can speak of the Christian way of life directly in connection with freedom ("Between Chaos and Paralysis," p. 750). He believes that the uniqueness of Christianity does not lie in the "fixation of a Christian morality" nor in the establishment of "a particular cultural construct". He even admits that Tillich is right in saying that Christianity has rightly found different forms of expression in diverse cultures ("Théologie Dogmatique," p. 145). "The Church is neither a society which has a certain political constitution and which obeys certain juridical rules, nor a movement whose members observe the same precepts with one moralistic purpose" ("Note Problématique Sur L'Histoire De L'Eglise", Foi et Vie (July-August 1949), p. 310). It is interesting that, though he writes a whole book on the Christian attitude toward money, in the same book he warns that he is not trying to impart a code (L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 165). In this regard, he advises parents to try to help their children to gain true freedom to make responsible decisions regarding money. He warns against the moralism involved in spelling things out in too much detail (L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 158).

the common Christian convictions of the Church about God and the unique requirements of God for that particular life. At the very centre of Ellul's concern is his anxiety that modern Christians have had their lives all too much determined by their environment and all too little determined by the Gospel.[1] Thus, in his discussion of life-styles, his major concern is that there be enough visibility to the Christian life that Christians may outwardly, as well as inwardly, break loose from conformity to the patterns of the modern world. He knows that there is a variety of ways of going about this; he is not seeking to prescribe a set mould for the Christian life.

Because subordination to Jesus Christ is very much a matter of allegiance to a free and personal Lord, there is a necessary degree of vagueness in Ellul's discussion of Christian life-styles.[2] He is not offering a casuistry, which would codify the Christian life, take God's place, and deny the dynamic nature of the Christian life.[3] We must not, however, forget that Ellul has given numerous concrete suggestions concerning the Church, politics, work, technology, propaganda, violence, etc. When he discusses these areas from a normative perspective (and he does), that should be seen as an aspect of his concern to help Christians recover more faithful ways of life.

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 146.
2. Ibid., p. 148.
3. See below, pp. 94-125.

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER IV

THE CONCRETENESS OF OBEDIENCE

From a study of Scripture[1] Ellul and Barth have come to an understanding of God as the living God who makes personal demands in history. Even more than the specific content of any scriptural command, they have learned from Scripture that God is a living God who demanded concrete obedience in the past and who thus makes concrete demands today.[2] Both men accept a dynamic and personalistic understanding of God's relationship to man (though they relate this to a salvation history model, as we will see later). Ellul writes, "There is never a divine requirement which is abstract, general, inherent, but only divine requirements which are concrete."[3]

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1. Ellul very much attempts to base his understanding of the Christian life on the interpretation of Scripture. On the first page of his major book on Christian ethics he writes, "I...confess that in this study and this research the criterion of my thought is the biblical revelation, the content of my thought is the biblical revelation, the point of departure is supplied by the biblical revelation, the method is the dialectic in accordance with which the biblical revelation is given us, and the purpose is a search for the significance of the biblical revelation concerning ethics" (To Will and To Do, p. 1; see also "Le Pauvre", Foi et Vie, p. 127). Elsewhere he tells us that Christian action should be specifically Christian, and by this he means that the Christian life should be based on the application of the Word of God (Violence, p. 47). He quotes Barth to the effect that ethics must never cease to bear witness to the reality from which it proceeds, the biblical Word. He agrees with Barth that the Christian ethic is to be based on the biblical witness and is not to be a phenomenological description of the Christian man (ibid., p. 265; quoting Barth II/2 (p. 537) later on page 310). (This of course, is not to say that a biblically based ethic cannot have phenomenological consequences).

2. Barth, II/2, p. 676.

3. To Will and To Do, p. 7. "The Christian ethic is an ethic of life and life is dynamic. Each situation, like each person, is novel. Casuistry is necessarily static and never exhausts the ingredients of a situation. The command of God is not a general rule, or a collection of rules. It is always particular for a person at this moment, in this situation." /...

The Will of God is not "immobilized in an objectively perceptible content, continuing without change."[1] God does not limit himself "to re-willing ceaselessly the same thing...like a record playing the same groove over and over again."[2]

God's Commandment and Biblical Law

From Karl Barth Ellul has learned a distinction between God's present commandment and biblical laws[3] and this distinction is of utmost importance at this point. (This distinction is really the outworking of Barth's reversal of the traditional order Law-Gospel).[4] Ellul agrees with Barth that the good is God Himself in His commandment and thus the good must not be dissociated from the personal activity of the Commander.[5]

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situation " (To Will and To Do, p. 209). Barth writes, "There is no divine claim in itself. There are only concrete divine claims" (Barth II/2, p. 566). "God always utters a concretissimum. But this divine concretissimum can as such neither be anticipated nor repeated. What God utters is never in any way known and true in abstraction from God Himself. It is known and true for no other reason than that He Himself says it, that He in peron is in and accompanies what is said by Him" (Barth I/1, p. 155).

1. To Will and To Do, p. 7.
2. To Will and To Do, p. 7.
3. Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 102ff.
4. See Prayer and Modern Man, p. 104.
5. To Will and To Do, p. 275 citing Barth, II/2, pp. 708-9. "If, in fact we formulate a good which is ours, a good which expresses God's will in permanent form, that implies that God is an object whose will is not living but is crystalized once for all, unchangeable to eternity, and that we know what it is. We are then faced with a conflict between God and his will, a sort of subordination of God to the good. Again, an objective good existing as law binds God and prevents him from acting, except as we have decided..." (ibid., p. 242).
   Ellul admits that his position is close to nominalism: "Commandment is not based on the divine essence but on the sovereign will of God. Taken in and of itself the commandment makes no sense. It only has meaning because God has spoken it " (ibid., p. 258). "In the Bible the good is not prior to God. The good is not God. The good is the will of God. All that God wills is good, not because God is subject to the good, obedient to the good, but simply because God wills it. It is not the good in itself that determines the will of God. It is the will of God which determines what is good, and there is no good which exists/...

"As Karl Barth has said, what man should do and should not do is not described for him by the ten commandments or the Sermon on the Mount, but he must hear it by a personal order of God."[1]

Barth's position does seem accurately embodied in Ellul's thought here.[2] An interesting feature of Barth's hermeneutic is that he tends to interpret more general moral teachings, such as the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments, in the context of God's concrete commanding activity elsewhere embodied in Scripture. He sees such collections as summaries of divine commands which were not intended

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exists outside of that decision " (ibid., p. 6). His position is not entirely nominalistic; he insists that God's revealed will is not arbitrary or tyrannical, but the expression of God's being as love (ibid., p. 268). For a discussion of related issues see Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, trans. by G.T. Thomson (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1950), pp. 93-97).

1. To Will and To Do, p. 222. "God's commandment should remain a commandment — that is to say, a personal word..." (ibid., p. 101). "Law is always objective, universal, neutral, impartial. ..,The law is an object, external to my life. It takes no account of the circumstances in which I find myself" (Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 102-103). "The commandment is the reverse of all that. It is a personal word addressed to me. A commandment is always an individualized word spoken by him who commands to him who should obey. It expresses the will of the superior, yet in addressing itself to a person in his individuality it takes into account the circumstances in which he finds himself, the human reality. It is always formulated hic et nunc. It is always a circumstantial word, which is never a sort of permanent, eternal presence, even when it is God who formulates this commandment. It is always registered in terms of the concrete facts, and must necessarily be interpreted in relation to them. It is a person-to-person relationship" (ibid., p. 103). Ellul is entirely opposed to the legalistic or objectivistic understanding of biblical commandments. "What is spoken by God to man in biblical history, a holy history of the walking together of God and man, cannot be transformed into a law which is valid of itself and universal" (ibid., pp. 103-4).
   Emil Brunner also develops a similar distinction to Ellul's distinction between God's commandment and biblical laws. See The Divine Imperative, pp. 111ff., 135, 204-5).

2. See Barth, II/2, pp. 671ff.

to supersede or replace God's particular address to individuals,[1]

A Rejection of the Rational Application of Biblical Codes and Principles

Because Ellul and Barth are committed to the living God, because they see the Christian life as involving direct obedience to the Holy Spirit, they are not willing to understand the Christian life as a rational application of a biblical code.[2] Ellul cites Bonhoeffer approvingly to the effect that obedience does not have to do with rules and exceptions.[3] Ellul, like Barth and Bonhoeffer, also opposes

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1. Barth II/2, pp. 679-682; see also p. 700; III/4, p. 12. "It can hardly be disputed that in this question of God's command in the Bible the obvious thing is to keep first and primarily to these series of direct commands which abound profusely in all parts of the Old and New Testaments. ... Do we not have to infer as a decisive principle of biblical ethics the fact that primarily the divine command does not take the form of universal and general rules, but that of individual concrete and specific orders and directions, so that man is not required to assimilate general rules, himself deciding about the good and the bad when he comes to apply them, but rather to keep steadily before him the special and definite thing that God enjoins him to do or not to do?" (Barth II/2, p. 675).

2. To Will and To Do, p. 215. "When we attempt to make precise rules for the Christian life, to build a moral code, a model which one must imitate and accomplish, we betray Jesus Christ himself. ...The Christian life is not a moral life, precisely because it does not obey a law, but because it belongs to Christ, because it is communion with the will of God and because this will is not Law, but Love and Freedom". ("Le Sens de la Liberté", pp. 16-17; see also "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 29).

3. To Will and To Do, pp. 273-4, citing Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 185ff; see below, p. 114 et seq., n. 2. Bonhoeffer tells us that "the will of God is always concrete, or else it is not the will of God. ... The will of God is not a princip from which one has to draw inferences and which has to be applied to 'reality'. A 'will of God' which can be recognized without immediately leading to action is a general principle, but it is not the will of God " (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 252). Barth writes, "God's commandment is the speech of God to man. Both in its contents and in its form it is concrete speech to the concrete man. God's commandment leaves man no room for application or interpretation. It leaves room only for obedience or disobedience. God's commandment cannot be found and known in detachment from time and place; it can only be heard in a local and temporal context. If God's commandment is not clear, definite and concrete to the last detail, then it is not God's commandment" (Barth III/4, p. 14). Barth wrote of Bonhoeffer's concept of "simple obedience": "Obedience is simple when/...

those efforts to build a Christian ethic from the rational application of biblical principles. He, for example, thinks of Christian love more in terms of a spiritual relationship of obedience to God; Reinhold Niebuhr thinks of love more in terms of a natural striving to approximate a biblical ideal, after having rationally assessed the available choices by this norm.[1]

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when we do just what we are told — nothing more, nothing less, and nothing different" (Barth, IV/2, p. 540). (For the development of this theme see also Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship; Barth, II/2, pp. 663-671; III/4, pp. 11-14; IV/2, p. 542; The Humanity of God, p. 86).

Barth, Bonhoeffer and Ellul stress the importance of rational situational analysis. These men do not represent an "intuitionism" which ignores the reality of the world. What they deny is that any such analysis can of itself determine the will of God for our lives. The will of God is "dialectically" related to such analysis. Such analysis is necessary as instructional preparation for hearing the Word of God, but cannot of itself speak the Word of God (To Will and To Do, p. 310, citing Barth, II/2, pp. 634-5; see also Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 7, 161-3; Barth, Against the Stream, pp. 152-4, 159). Ellul says, "Contrary to widely held opinion, faith in the Holy Spirit does not mean that we may act imprudently, close our eyes and refuse to think; rather, it means that we must use our heads and try to see with clarity. True, the Holy Spirit — who is clarity itself — may propel us into the greatest imprudence; but then we shall know it" (Violence, pp. 82-3, see also False Presence, p. 2).

The difference between Barth and Ellul at this point may be that Ellul applies in practice what both men affirm in theory. Ellul's ethic decisively relates to his very sophisticated and thorough knowledge of the modern world. It is doubtful whether Barth really possessed this kind of a depth knowledge of modern society and hence it is doubtful whether he was really in a position to apply what his theory allowed. For a deep knowledge of the modern world, one must do more than read the Bible and the newspaper (John D. Godsey, "Portrait of Karl Barth", in Karl Barth, How I Changed my Mind, Introduction, p. 12; see also Barth, Romans, p. 425). It is Ellul's additional sociological knowledge that here sets him off from Barth.

1. Ellul writes, "We must be convinced that there is no such thing as 'Christian principles'. There is the Person of Christ, who is the principle of everything. But if we wish to be faithful to Him, we cannot dream of reducing Christianity to a certain number of principles...the consequences of which can be logically deduced" (The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 52; see also To Will and To Do, pp. 83-4, 219). "God's commands never aim at bringing a man to realize an ideal, which all moralities of the world tend to do. God's commands always relate to an action connected with the establishment and proclamation of his covenant, with his promised kingdom which is close upon us. Therefore, in Christian ethics it will never be a matter of doing some good or other, but of carrying out a certain task relating to the kingdom of God and to the witness which God calls upon/...

Ellul's insistence on a kind of "contextualism" is based mainly on his understanding of God as a living reality. It is, however, also the case that he argues that a legalistic ethic is irrelevant to life, because life is dynamic.[1] He believes that a Christian ethic should stand in relation to the concrete circumstances of life and hence be subject to change.[2] He thinks that works on Christian ethics should seek to help Christians to be present in the actual world in which they live.[3] He agrees with Reinhold Niebuhr that ethics involve a

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upon us to bear" (To Will and To Do, p. 84). He believes that if it were possible to formulate the will of God in principles, these principles would in effect be superior to God and there would no longer be the need for a relationship between God and man. Man would then in effect be claiming to know of himself, what Ellul believes can only be known through personal revelation (ibid., pp. 203-4). (It is interesting that he criticizes idealism precisely because he thinks that in idealism the "good" becomes superior to God and thus empties the belief in the Holy Spirit of all content. He thinks that idealism establishes the superiority of morality over religion — ibid., pp. 134-5; see also p. 204).

In like manner Barth writes, "How strangely would the Bible deviate from its proper theme and content...if it were to describe the will of God as the establishment and proclamation of general precepts and rules which can be filled out only on the basis of the reflection and decision of man!" (II/2, p. 678).

The difference between Barth, Ellul and Bonhoeffer as compared with Reinhold Niebuhr is that the former men emphasize the present activity of the Holy Spirit and interpret biblical moral teachings in this context, whereas Niebuhr stresses the example of Christ on the cross (and the earlier Niebuhr the teachings of Jesus), and leaves the application pretty much to natural reason. Barth and Ellul pose an important question for Niebuhr's thought as to whether his ethic has an adequate place for the activity of the Holy Spirit and thus whether Niebuhr has avoided the criticisms levied against idealism. In Niebuhr's thought, does not the human effort to approximate a principle assume the role of the Holy Spirit?

1. To Will and To Do, p. 209.

2. To Will and To Do, pp. 225, 247, 250, 265; The Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 21-22.

3. To Will and To Do, p. 251. Ellul is here in conscious dependence on both Barth and Bonhoeffer. He cites his agreement with Bonhoeffer that ethics have to do with actual people in real history (ibid., p. 250; see also Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 232, 238-9). Likewise he agrees with Barth that ethics have to do with the relationship of God and man in history (ibid., p. 250).

Though Ellul argues that the Christian ethic ought to be continually "revised, re-examined, and re-shaped by the combined effort of the Church as a whole" (The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 22), he is not/...

relation to the given facts of the world.[1] He agrees with Niebuhr's

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not saying that the world has the right to determine the content of the Christian ethic. He criticizes "a situation ethic — an ethic that condones any objective society decides on" (Violence, p. 56). His position is much more difficult and subtle than either orthodoxy's timeless code morality or liberal theology's identification with cultural trends. It is related to the modern world, but is not determined by the modern world (The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 28; see also The Political Illusion, p. 53). (Ellul's "in the world but not of the world" reasoning is here being applied). He is arguing for the importance of sensitivity to the will of the Lord as it relates to the actual issues of the world in which one lives (To Will and To Do, p. 310). He criticizes Sartre, not because Sartre takes modern circumstances into consideration, which Ellul also wishes to do, but because he believes that Sartre's thought is excessively determined by those circumstances (The Political Illusion, p. 53). Ellul knows that the living Word of God can no more be determined by the situation itself than it can be determined by a mere reference to a code from the past. It is the spirituality of the Word of God which separates his situational approach from those which really have to do only with immanental possibilities.

1. To Will and To Do, p. 250. He, however, disagrees with Niebuhr precisely at a point where Barth's theology is different from Niebuhr's. He insists that the Christian's relationship with the world must occur without Christian revelation turning into a possibility immanent within the historical process. In other words, he does not think that Niebuhr has succeeded in preserving the autonomous nature of the Christian ethic in the face of the world (ibid., p. 250). He thinks that Niebuhr has succeeded in relating Christian ethics to the world at the cost of having lost some important Christian content. What Ellul is striving to express about Christian ethics was very well said by Barth with reference to dogmatics: "In the present and for the sake of the present, dogmatics will not inquire about the voice of the day, but about the voice of God for the day..." (Barth, I/2, p. 843). Ellul, like Barth, is concerned that ethics relate to the modern world, but both men are much more concerned about the dangers of cultural adaptation than was Reinhold Niebuhr.

critique of "orthodox" theology. Niebuhr accused orthodoxy of bypassing the problems of modern men by its simple identification of the will of God with biblical codes. Orthodoxy offers "irrelevant precepts", creating a break between the imperative and the real.[1]

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 299. Niebuhr writes of Christian orthodoxy, "Its morality is expressed in dogmatic and authoritarian moral codes. It tries vainly to meet the social perplexities of a complex civilization with irrelevant precepts deriving their authority from their — sometimes quite fortuitous — inclusion in a sacred canon. It concerns itself with the violation of Sabbatarian prohibitions..." (Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics, p. 14; see also p. 18). Of the Reformers themselves Niebuhr writes, "The scriptural authority, below the level of love, is less valid in the realm of law than the Reformation assumes because there is always an element of historical contingency in the allegedly absolute norms of Scripture context (St. Paul's attitude toward women in the Church is a case in point)" (Reinhold Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems (1953), p. 172).

Ellul, like Niebuhr, cites the Reformers as examples of the inadequate use of biblical moral teachings (To Will and To Do, p. 245), the identification of the transcendent will of God with canonical moral codes (ibid., p. 308). "One confused, then, the definite seriousness of theological formulations concerning the truth of revelation with the moral commandment, which was no longer distinguished from them. Once adopted, the ethical structure is just as untouchable as the theological propositions". (ibid., p. 246). (From this last statement we can see that Ellul regards the Bible as primarily a theological book, a book indicating God's revealed nature, and only secondarily and in a more relative way a book about morality).

Ellul says that Paul presents a fairly complete theology but does not even intend to present a complete ethic. He says that Paul offers moral examples, describing only aspects of the Christian life (ibid., p. 299). He points out that the Bible itself presents several different moralities, which are not all consistent with each other: "The commandments as a whole do not possess that splendid unity which we would like to attribute to the work of God!" (ibid., p. 300; see also p. 48) He points out that not all moralities of the Bible speak with equal authority today. In fact, he thinks some biblical moralities are not and should not be authoritative today. He refers to such embarrassing Old Testament stories as Abraham's call to sacrifice his son, the polygamy of the patriarchs, Abraham's attitude toward Sarah, Tamar's seduction of her father-in-law, and the dreadful requirement of the herem to make his point. He also refers to Elijah's slaughter of the prophets of Baal (To Will and To Do, pp. 99, 205-7; Violence, p. 161).

Ellul recognizes that all biblical moralities are time-conditioned and must be understood within the context of the particularities of the past age and historical situation in which they were written (To Will and To Do, p. 300). He does seem a bit inconsistent to insist on such commands as the herem having been God's will (ibid., pp. 206-208), while at the same time claiming to agree with Niebuhr on the/...

Ellul is too much of a biblical theologian to base his case primarily on historical relevance the way Niebuhr does; he is too much of a sociologist to ignore the factor of relevance entirely.

Theocentric Relativism

Ellul's covenant understanding of the Christian life leads to what might be called "theocentric relativism". "A thing is never good or bad in itself, not even by the use men make of it. A thing is only good or bad in its own time, according to its situation in the light of the Kingdom of God, according to its conformity to the work of God..."[1] He tells us that the revelation of God personalizes and causes each life to become singular and unique and open to the particularities of God's will.[2] He cites his agreement with Barth, that all that man is, does and wills must be constantly called into question by God.[3]

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the relativity of canonical moral codes. Ellul seems to think of the relativity of such codes in a different way from that of Niebuhr. Niebuhr thinks that a large amount of scriptural morality never was commanded by God, but was merely a reflection of "primitive social standards." Ellul thinks that most biblical morality was once based on God's will for a particular situation, but he thinks that some biblical morality no longer embodies God's will.

1. The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 55.

2. "There is not one Christian life. There are as many Christian lives as there are Christians. There are not Christian works, except insofar as the Holy Spirit pushes a man to make decisions and to fulfil holiness. Thus one lives in a world endlessly deployed along paths which open up step by step as one follows them, without their in any sense being mapped in advance. One lives in ever-surprising novelty. There is not, to be sure, an absence of continuity, breaks between yesterday and today; but today's innovation could not have been deduced logically and rationally from yesterday's decision since it does not obey a human logic, a rational conduct of life" (To Will and To Do, p. 219).

3. To Will and To Do, p. 215. Barth tells us that we must be willing to accept the "inevitable relativisation of all our own hypotheses and convictions " (Barth, II/2, p. 654). He insists that openness to the command of God means bracketing and holding in reserve what we think we know about the rightness and goodness of our past and present decisions, and the rules and axioms of the past (II/2, p. 646). "None of these has an unlimited claim to be valid again today as it was valid/...

Casuistry and Practical Casuistry

Barth and Ellul oppose "casuistry". By casuistry they mean a moral approach which confuses its own words of witness with God's absolute will and which claims to offer an infallible interpretation of God's will. They oppose this casuistry because it denies the concrete and historical nature of man's obedience to God and because it confuses the Church's voice with the voice of the Church's Lord, thus denying God the freedom to reveal his own will.[1]

While rejecting "casuistry", Ellul follows Barth in affirming a "practical casuistry". The difference between casuistry and practical casuistry is that the latter is aware of its own relativity.[2] Ellul

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valid yesterday. None of them is identical with the divine command" (Barth II/2, p. 646). For Barth's thought on this point as it relates to politics see Against the Stream, pp. 85-92, 114. See below, pp. 283-284, for Barth's and Ellul's related positions on politics.

1. To Will and To Do, pp. 209-214, 241-2, 303. Barth argues that casuistry destroys Christian freedom. It interposes something between the command of God and man's free obedience. Casuistry conceals from us the character of our conduct as our own direct responsibility to God (Barth III/4, pp. 13-14). "It spares him what he should not be spared — the knowledge that it is not merely his external conduct, nor his will, purpose and intention, but himself that is demanded" (Barth III/4, p. 14; see also III/4, pp. 6ff., 31; The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, p. 24).

   Barth's rejection of casuistry may itself be influenced by Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer wrote, "an ethic cannot be a book in which there is set out how everything in the world actually ought to be but unfortunately is not, and an ethicist cannot be a man who always knows better than others what is to be done and how it is to be done. An ethic cannot be a work of reference for moral action which is guaranteed to be unexceptionable, and the ethicist cannot be the competent critic and judge of every human activity " (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 236).

2. Ellul believes that a true Christian ethic must stand under the judgment of God, with the hope of God's blessing but without the claim of divine authority. He sees Christian ethics as involving human debate and dialogue, rather than having to do with infallible pronouncements (To Will and To Do, p. 247). "Every ethic formulated in the church wears by that very fact its relativity, its need for constant renewal, for one knows very well that it is the product of a human search; whereas the ethic which pretends to be the immediate application of the commandment claims to be unalterable because directly inspired by God..,Thus the first conspicuous service which the clear and precise formulation of an ethic renders to the church and to Christians is to remind them of the relative, even fluctuating character/...

writes, "As Karl Barth quite rightly says,

> there can be a casuistry of practice, in which a person faced with a case of conscience can encounter another person who helps him resolve that problem, but there cannot be a casuistic ethic, nor any technical method for applying the text to a multiplicity of cases, nor for drawing an inference of good and evil on the basis of the truth of the text."[1]

The distinction here is a vital one. Neither Ellul nor Barth is defending an individualism. Both think that God's Word occurs in the context of the conversation in which fellow-Christians witness to their understanding of God's present demand.[2]

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character of morality..." (ibid., p. 247). "Ethical reflection, then, will be the knowledge which accompanies each of our decisions in relation to those which precede it or are to follow it, but nothing more!" (ibid., p. 305). According to him the only legitimate place for the Christian ethic is "within the limits indicated by a servant role, beneath the cross and in the hope of its pardon " (ibid., p. 266).

Ellul believes that one reason that modern statements of Christian ethics should be formulated is precisely to help preserve the relative nature of all human formulations about the content of God's demand (ibid., p. 246). He thinks that in the absence of contemporary restatements of Christian ethics, Christians tend to misuse scriptural teaching in literalistic ways. The Church's ethical thinking becomes fixated and unrelated to modern life (ibid., p.245).

1. To Will and To Do, p. 210.

2. Ellul thinks that in the absence of contemporary moral conversation in the Church, the Holy Spirit tends to become an abstraction, having little moral bearing on people's lives (To Will and To Do, p. 246). He believes that the relative is important (ibid., p.260). He thinks that in the absence of such important, though relative, conversation the Church has no answers to the complex moral problems of life — and Christians simply conform to their social conditioning (ibid., pp. 246-8). Without moral conversation, Christians lack initiative and imagination. They uncritically accept the social and political views they have held for twenty years and cling to outworn forms of churchly organization. Ellul sees the Christian ethic as a vital tool for jarring Christians out of complacency and conformity. It helps to suggest new and creative responses to moral problems (ibid., p. 253). "To be sure, ethics is no substitute for individual decision. It cannot be put in the place of the Christian, nor be a screen between him and God, but it can bring support to a lack of discovery. It can set forth 'models', not in the sense of examples to be imitated, but in the economic sense of the word. These models would be examples of possible forms of expression of the faith (and not ready-made solutions), as a point of departure from which a person could reason and come up effectively with something else " (ibid., pp. 253-4).

What both men are saying is that though human witness is essential, it is relative and it is relative precisely because the Word of God is God's free and personal claim. Christians offer advice, not absolute imperatives.[1] Barth at one place suggests that Christians are not to set up laws, but to ask "arrow-like questions".[2] The asking of "arrow-like questions" very adequately summarizes the role Barth and Ellul assign to the Christian ethic and the Christian ethicist.

The Use of Moral Revelation From the Past

As surprising as it may seem from the foregoing statements in this chapter, Ellul and Barth both attribute an important place to God's past moral revelation. Having seemingly overstated their case in terms which verge on a denial of the importance of past moral revelation, they correct themselves by emphasizing precisely what they

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 252. "Evangelical ethics will leave the pronouncement of unconditional imperatives to God... This does not exclude the possibility of conditional imperatives addressed in concrete situations by a person to a brother. It is part of the risk of obedience involved in the encounter and communion between Christian brothers, and it is part of the risk of action according to the God-given freedom, to be called to invite, even to urge, a brother to a concrete action in a concrete situation, and to ask from him a concrete decision. Man will do so with his eyes lifted up to the living God who is also his brother's God " (Barth, The Humanity of God, p. 86).

   Ellul writes of the Christian ethic, "At heart, this is a fight of faith; individual, and in the presence of God... It is never a series of rules, or principles, or slogans, and every Christian is really responsible for his works and for his conscience. Thus we can never make a complete and valid description of the ethical demands of God, any more than we can reach its heart. We can only define its outline, and its conditions, and study some of its elements for purposes of illustration " (The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 20). "But this elaboration must not be substituted for the fight of faith, which every Christian must wage; that is why it is indicative, not imperative. We must not imagine that this ethic will give us the permanent solution of all problems " (The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 22).

2. Barth, III/4, p. 71.

previously seemed to minimize. Ellul tells us that because God is One[1] there is a consistent relationship between God's demands in the past and His expectations today. Because God is One the Christian moral life is not "unadulterated incoherence". Christian actions do not succeed one another disconnectedly, blindly, nor in contradictory ways.[2] He tells us that though he lays great stress on God's freedom to reveal his will, he does not understand God's freedom as arbitrary or absurd or inconsistent with past revelation.[3]

> The preceding propositions do not imply a personal conduct directly inspired by the Holy Spirit at every moment, nor a disjointed ethic sometimes defended on the basis of the text 'The Spirit blows where it wills.' In this Karl Barth criticizes Soë who gives in a little too much to inspiration hic et nunc (Barth III/4, sec 52).[4]

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1. He also argues that God's concrete commanding relates to His being as love, though the implication is clearly that we could not determine concrete commands by a logical deduction from our understanding of God's nature (To Will and To Do, p. 268).

2. To Will and To Do, p. 23. "The command of God is not a sequence of isolated, absurd revelations, for he who issues the command is the one, eternal God. Each prescription is linked with other prescriptions because they are part of the divine order and cannot be separated " (ibid., p. 259; see also p. 263). "Even though it is always a matter of particular commandments the command of God never degenerates into a sort of incoherent chaos of special and contradictory directives addressed to ever different individuals. Man in the presence of God's command does not dissociate into a series of situations without common ground with his fellows and without continuity, for the command comes from God and God himself is consistent " (ibid., p. 301). For Barth's statement of the same point see III/4, pp. 15-17. See Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, p. 135, for a similar understanding of the givenness and flexibility of biblical law, based on the Reformation understanding of the relationship between the biblical Word and the Spirit.

3. To Will and To Do, p. 262.

4. To Will and To Do, p. 304. That Ellul sometimes seems wildly paradoxical in his formulations can be seen by setting another quotation next to the one just given. He wrote earlier in the same book, "Now the Spirit blows where it wills. He is unpredictable in his entrance as well as in his effects. He cannot be bound. He cannot be possessed. He comes and he goes. When we walk in his light we cannot be assured that it will not suddenly disappear. As a result, we can put nothing together which is consistent, continuous, predictable, neither in our work nor in our conduct, nor in our striving for an ascetic morality...because in the first place this intervention of the Holy Spirit alone renders us apt for hearing and obeying the commandment of God. It alone makes us hear the commandment as really/...

Ellul notes his agreement with Barth that "What God wants of man is only revealed to us in what he wants and has already done for us (Barth II/2, p. 538)."[1]

Both Ellul and Barth retain as decisive the belief that God speaks here and now, yet both also affirm the significance of past moral revelation.[2] Though neither man very explicitly relates his intention here to a doctrine of the Trinity, a trinitarian belief is affirmed by both men and seems to be the underlying assumption for their style of Christian ethic.[3]

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really addressed to us personally, and in so doing it gives us the power, the capacity, for carrying it out" (To Will and To Do, p. 213). Barth also makes overstatements at this point. For example, compare what Barth says about the law in III/3, pp. 254-255, with what he says about the law as a lower limit (which we will discuss on pp. 109-116).

1. To Will and To Do, p. 309. "God is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He at no time deceives us about himself. That which he revealed yesterday is always completely valid. Therefore we count on a steadfastness, on a continuity on the part of God. We are not at all given over to a despot who would toy with us" (ibid., p. 263). From the time we come to know of God's love in Christ, we know that God does not intend to deceive us or lead us in a capricious way (ibid., p. 263). See The Politics of God and the Politics of Man, p. 47, for a dialectical pairing of two aspects of God's activity: God as the disturber of theological formulations and God as the God of tradition who has spoken and revealed His will in the past. In the light of these two aspects of God's activity, Ellul defends the importance of both Christian innovation and Christian tradition.

2. To Will and To Do, p. 304.

3. In one footnote Ellul refers to the doctrine of the Trinity in this context (To Will and To Do, pp. 303-5). He points out that the Holy Spirit has no autonomy with respect to the Trinity. The Holy Spirit relates to the objectivity of God's past revelation in Jesus Christ — thus, there is a oneness about God's activity (ibid., p. 304). Barth, of course, has placed the doctrine of the Trinity at the beginning of his dogmatics and regards it as normative for the understanding of God's revelation (Barth I/1, p. 346). "The doctrine of the Trinity thus becomes normative for the development of every part of dogmatics, and, by virtue of the unity established by Barth between dogmatics and ethics, for the development of a theological ethic as well" (Robert E. Willis, The Ethics of Karl Barth, pp. 114-115).

In contrast to the extreme situational ethicists, both men stress the significance of past revelation;[1] yet past revelation is seen to be concretized by and in some cases severely relativized by God's present activity.[2] The trinitarian God is seen to be consistent, but not monotonous.[3] God commands in ways consistent with his past activity, but does not merely repeat himself; at least, he does not necessarily do so. Ethics in a trinitarian style involves openness to change because the Holy Spirit is alive today. It also involves continuity,

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1. Paul Lehmann's Ethics in a Christian Context is in the Barthian tradition of emphasizing the freedom of God, but it does not recognise the significance of past moral revelation. One searches in vain in his work for references to moral guidelines drawn from past revelation. Lehmann writes, "The theonomous conscience is the conscience immediately sensitive to the freedom of God to do in the always changing human situation what his humanizing aims and purposes require. The theonomous conscience is governed and directed by the freedom of God alone " (Paul Lehmann, Ethics in a Christian Context, pp. 358-9). I agree entirely with Paul Ramsey when he writes, "Barth can take ethics more seriously than Lehmann precisely because his theology is more adequate. While for Barth God is free, He has also made Himself known quite historically in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ becomes the datum for the moral life of a Christian in Barth in a way that He does not for Lehmann. ...While there remains the possibility in Barth of entirely novel, free acts of God, there is a shape to the gospel of God and a shape to His action that enables us to reflect upon it for our knowledge of God and for our knowledge into the shape of Christian moral action " (Paul Ramsey, Deeds and Rules in Christian Ethics, p. 51).

2. Ellul thinks that Bultmann neglects the continuity of God's will and reduces the Christian life to obedience in the moment (To Will and To do, p. 300). In short, he fails to recognize the significance of biblical law. "Let us always remember that 'whenever the grace becomes event and revelation it ends in the institution of the law '" (ibid., p. 205, on p. 302 citing Barth II/2, p. 562). Bultmann's underemphasis on the importance of the law for moral guidance is certainly due to his existentialism and also probably due to his Lutheran background. Ellul is in the Calvinist tradition in emphasizing the importance of the law for moral guidance and certainly does not intend to be an existentialist. (However, compare To Will and To Do, p. 219; see also the appendix on pp. 424ff. below.)

   Ellul shares with Bultmann a fear that the development of full ethical systems can lead to Pharisaic easy consciences and to a failure to depend on grace (ibid., pp. 174-5, 222-223). Though Ellul does not seem to eliminate biblical law in the way Bultmann does, Bultmann's motive for being suspicious of ethical systems is most decisively shared by Ellul.

3. Barth III/4, p. 16.

because God has spoken in the past.[1]

The Law as a Lower Limit[2]

Ellul and Barth are quite clear that the Christian is to live in personal obedience to God here and now. They are both less clear as to the precise way in which we are to use biblical law in the fulfilment of this task. That is, they are less clear as to the way present obedience to the Holy Spirit is related to God's past moral revelation. It seems that the confusion here goes back to the basic Barthian subjective understanding of the Word of God.[3] To say that the Word of God is dialectically related to Scripture does not mean that the moral message of Scripture cannot as such become the Word of God, at least as a lower limit showing God's demand.[4]

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1. Oscar Cullman gives hints concerning a salvation history ethic along these same lines. See Salvation in History, pp. 304, 328-338.

2. This aspect of Barth and Ellul's thought can be called "the law as a lower limit" only if we recognize that in Barth's discussion of The Sermon on The Mount he indicates that the demands contained therein are anything but lower limits (Barth II/2, p. 689). We could change the title to "the law as a relatively firm guideline", but we would be missing the main point. Most of Barth's discussion here and all of Ellul's has to do with seeing the law as expressing God's minimal demands. If Barth's discussion of The Sermon on The Mount is bracketed, the general topic here is the sense in which there are lower limits indicated in biblical law and the related recognition that God's absolute demands are more exacting than biblical law, and can only be understood by the activity of the Holy Spirit. In order to avoid confusion, we leave the heading as it is, and will footnote Barth's reference to The Sermon on the Mount.
   The fact that the demands of The Sermon on The Mount are closer to an "impossible ideal" than a "lower limit" indicate that there are various types of biblical laws and that they cannot all be treated in the same way. Barth and Ellul also recognize the existence of biblical legal diversity, since they at other places speak of the law more as instructional preparation than as a relatively firm lower limit. (See below, pp. 116-120).

3. See below, p. 124, n. 1.

4. Barth is quite clear that the words of Scripture are never identical with the Word of God. The question is asked, "If you are studying the words of Paul, will there be any given moment when the words of Paul become identical with the Word of God for you?" Barth replies, "No. For you there may be a unity, but not identity " (Table Talk, p. 35).

Barth and Ellul as believing Christians see some aspects of biblical law as representing a considerable degree of givenness, a kind of lower limit below which Christian morality must not fall, but above which only the Holy Spirit can indicate.

Barth, for example, says that the Ten Commandments do not contain concrete commands, but do mark out certain delimitations.[1] "We are simply told what must not in any circumstances take place in this sphere. ... In concreto many other things not excluded by these terms are illegitimate. But what is excluded by them must not be done in any circumstances." [my underlines][2] Thus, biblical law does not exhaustively describe God's will, but at some points does provide a rather firm guideline of some outer limits beyond which Christian conduct must not stray.[3]

Like Barth, Ellul tells us that there is no question of doing less than the law requires, but rather more. "There are consequences of faith which can be objectively indicated."[4] "Faith does not set

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1. Barth II/2, p. 684.

2. Barth II/2, pp. 684-5. The absolute firmness of this statement is uncharacteristic of Barth, as we have seen in the preceding pages and as we will see in the following.

3. While not seeing The Sermon on The Mount as a lower limit, Barth does insist that the Christian life cannot be constructed merely by reference to such teachings; yet, he thinks that such teachings are essential for understanding some of the contours of the Christian life (II/2, p. 688).

4. The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 21. One reason Ellul thinks that the objective side of the law must be indicated is that he believes that we are sinners, all too prone to conform to our own sinful nature, and hence we need moral guidance (ibid., pp. 21-2). He is in agreement with Calvin in his reasoning at this point, though he would not accept Calvin's rather non-selective use of biblical law. (For the contrast between this Calvinist position and Luther's see Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Part 2, pp. 188-204. For a position similar to Ellul's, see Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, p. 148). Ellul believes that Christian spontaneity is more likely to be an expression of social conformity than an expression of obedience to the Holy Spirit (False Presence, pp. 84-5; "Théologie Dogmatique," p. 150). Along related lines Victor Paul Furnish writes, "Paul does not...presume that the Christian's obedience is a 'spontaneous' expression of the new life. The Pauline indicative/...

us free from the law in order to allow us not to carry it out."[1] He even says that there is a place for habit and custom in the Christian life, as long as we do not use these to evade the radical claim of the Holy Spirit.[2] Ellul's main example of what he means by the law as a lower limit is the Old Testament practice of tithing:-

> The tithe was one of the requirements of the law. Life in faith liberates us from that requirement, but not so that we may avoid paying the tithe. To the contrary, it faces us with the problem of the total dedication of our possessions to God which should be translated into an actual gift of much more than the tithe."[3]

He also gives the example of prayer. Though he knows that prayer must be inspired by the Holy Spirit, he nevertheless bases prayer in part on the objective biblical command to pray.[4]

Ellul appeals to the apostle Paul for the biblical precedent for the practice of emphasizing a Spirit ethic and yet having concern for the law as helping to give shape to the Christian life. Since Christians of the first century often behaved as though they did not live by the Holy Spirit, Paul enunciated certain requirements for the Christian life, though he did not see his advice as an exhaustive description of God's expectations.[5] (Ellul would not accept all of Paul's recommendations, but agrees in principle that we must pay careful attention to the structural aspects of the Christian life as indicated in Scripture).[6]

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indicative and imperative are both to be taken seriously. Indeed, the apostle's exhortations seek to summon believers to that kind of deliberate response to God's claim without which faith forfeits its distinctive character as obedience " (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, p. 227).

1. To Will and To Do, p. 254.
2. Ibid., p. 255.
3. Ibid., pp. 254-5.
4. Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 102, 109, 115.
5. To Will and To Do, pp. 227-228.
6. Victor Paul Furnish points out that Paul appealed to the binding force of the law's command (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; I Cor. 7:19) (Victor/...

When Ellul speaks of the law as a lower limit, he means in part that Christian freedom should lead the Christian infinitely beyond the requirements of the law.[1] He is concerned that Christians not use their freedom as a way of choosing the easy life, but as an expression of obedience far exceeding the letter of the law. "It is easy to criticize the ascetic attitude. But one may do this only if he is prepared to go beyond it and do better."[2]

Ellul cites his dependence on Barth for the development of his idea of the law as a lower limit and for the idea that the Christian ethic is to describe the lower limits indicated in Scripture:-

> Karl Barth has a striking formula on this subject: the task of ethics cannot be to decide the content of God's commandment, nor to judge man's action, but to describe the limits of God's commandment and of man's corresponding action. We are indeed faced with one of the principal functions of that ethic, which cannot formulate the imperative addressed to a man, nor fixate the will of God

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(Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, p. 199, 228; see also Rom. 7:12,14). Furnish also notes that Paul's concrete exhortations were not an attempt to define God's maximum demands, but only God's minimal requirements (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics, pp. 75, 77; see also p. 192). Of the synoptic tradition, Furnish writes, "As a command, then, love stands over every particular requirement or set of requirements. This is what it means to say, as we have said, that love was understood in the Jesus-traditions as the critical measure of the law itself. ... The earliest church constantly particularized the love command by formulating specific rules of practice for its life. But in general (although not without exceptions) the church avoided reducing the commandment to such rules or using these rules as if, collectively, they exhausted the meaning of the love command itself" (Victor Paul Furnish, The Love Command, p. 205).

1. False Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 77-8. An example he cites is that Christians should use Sunday to glorify God in innovative ways, rather than using the day as simply a day for relaxation. (ibid., p. 78).

2. The Politics of God and the Politics of Man, p. 106. He can even use language in defence of the law which is hard to reconcile with what he says elsewhere about the freedom of the Christian man. He writes, "Jesus is not evading the problem of law and order. There is a divine law, which is a commandment, and which is addressed to us. Hence we have to fulfil it to the letter. We have to do all that is commanded " (The Politics of God and the Politics of Man, p. 195).

for all eternity, but in displaying the continuity of the revelation it can remind man where the commandment granted hic et nunc enters in. [1]

One aspect of Ellul's understanding of biblical law is particularly different from an existentialist ethic. He argues that the Christian law and the Christian ethic can provide continuity in the Christian life when the direct revelation of God is not being spoken or heard.[2] In order for this point to make sense, the person would have had to have known God's personal revelation previously; otherwise, the structural aspects of biblical law would not be regarded as authoritative. A commandment becomes authoritative only when by God's grace it becomes a personal command. The issue is whether there is a givenness to the commandment once it is received in this way. Ellul and Barth seem to answer yes, at least for some aspects of biblical law, and thus they are not willing to make the content of the Christian life a mere function of momentary inspiration.[3]

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1. To Will and To Do, pp. 248-9, on p. 309 referring to Barth III/4, p. 31; see also The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 23.

2. To Will and To Do, p. 256. Though the Christian is to remember God's law at all times, rememberance is seen by Ellul to be particularly important in the context where God seems to be silent (ibid., pp. 255-7). He also agrees with Soë (Christliche Ethik, sec. 17) that a memory of God's past revelation in our life is necessary for the proper reception of the Holy Spirit's guidance today. When the Holy Spirit speaks to us today, He does not find a tabula rasa (ibid., pp. 259-260, 309).

3. See Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 57, 102, 104, 109-111; "Watch and Pray", in Eternity 22, No. 10 (Oct. 1971) pp. 26-7. Ellul even insists that we must guard against the notion that we should passively wait for the Word of God and refrain from acting until we have the clear and conscious certainty of God's will. He points out that in the Acts of the Apostles, Peter and Paul are said to have undertaken missionary journeys without the clear instigation of the Holy Spirit. He notes that Paul is said to have been prevented from going to Asia by the Holy Spirit after he had already set out in that direction (Acts 16:1-10) (To Will and To Do, p. 257). "The attitude which consists in saying that one acts solely at the instigation of the Holy Spirit (and this means a clear and conscious instigation, of which we have explicit knowledge) is a dangerous attitude, for it can easily lead to doing nothing, on the pretext that the Holy Spirit has not spoken. It can also lead to carrying out/...

When Ellul speaks of biblical law as a lower limit, he is not intending to say that the major aspect of the Christian life can be determined by the structural demands of the Bible. These are lower limits. The Christian life goes far beyond these minimal demands. He is quite clear that what he has in mind is only the barest outline of minimal conditions. He can even refer to these structural guidelines as "illustrations".[1] That he can refer to laws as illustrations indicates that even when he refers to the law as a lower limit, he is not intending to deny God the right to grant exceptions.[2] That this is

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out our own desires, because the word of the Holy Spirit is spoken to us in a manner so secret that it is not subject to any examination whatsoever by one's brethren and by the church. But in that case how does one distinguish what is truly the Holy Spirit from one's subconscious?" (ibid., pp. 257-8). Ellul applies his own practical insights to the issue of prayer, calling Christians to pray actively to God even when God seems silent. He stresses the activity of man so strongly as to refer to prayer as "combat against God" (Ellul, Prayer and Modern Man, p. 153).

I can't entirely agree with Richard Ray's criticism that Ellul bases prayer solely on the biblical command to pray (Richard Ray, "Review of Prayer and Modern Man", Interpretation XXVI No. 1 (Jan. 1972), pp. 117-118). Ellul's discussion of prayer does suffer from ambiguity. Particular passages confirm Ray's criticism, but surely his book taken as a whole does not unambiguously support this conclusion. Ellul strives to base prayer on the continuing significance of the biblical commandment to those who have received grace. This is why at places he sounds as though he is basing prayer on grace and at other places as though he is basing it on obedience to the biblical command (see Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 57, 62, 102, 109-111; "Watch and Pray", pp. 26-7). In fact, he is basing prayer on the combination of these two factors. We must never forget that he does accept Barth's reversal of the Law and the Gospel, and having done so could not base prayer solely on the biblical commandment.

Ellul sometimes seems to relate the basis of prayer as obedience, to a reluctance of God to reveal His presence, rather than man's response to God's free revelation (ibid., pp. 140-142). At these points Ray's words ring true, but what Ray has uncovered is an internal contradiction, not a simple and straight forward effort on Ellul's part to base prayer on duty rather than grace.

1. The Presence of the Kingdom, p. 20.

2. One wonders if Barth and Ellul are entirely consistent in saying that Christianity has nothing to do with rules and exceptions. (See above pp. 97-98 & fn). When they refer to the law as a lower limit, they seem to refer to relatively firm rules, which seem to hold true pending some radical reversal by the Holy Spirit. The following statement about Barth's ethic is instructive in that it indicates how close Barth's ethic at places comes to being an ethic of divine rules and divine exceptions. Robert E. Willis writes, "Negatively, the usual/...

the case is indicated when he tells us that the Holy Spirit can bring about a "suspension of ethics".[1] He explicitly rejects the understanding of biblical law which sees it as an inflexible given.[2] All these considerations lead to the conclusion that Ellul in the final analysis does not intend that the law as a lower limit be understood in an absolutely inflexible way, but rather as a relatively firm guideline for the perception of God's will.

Likewise, Barth in the final analysis emphasizes the flexibility of the Christian ethic and does not regard the law as a lower limit as being a kind of inflexible absolute. That this is the case for both Barth and Ellul is obvious when we remember that even the determining of what constitutes the lower limit itself involves Christian subjectivity or, rather, obedience to the living God. When Barth and Ellul

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usual direction in which obedience lies might be formulated this way: As a rule, or generally, or for the most part...Christians do not divorce, kill, go to war, commit suicide, condone capital punishment, or renounce (even temporarily) solidarity with their fellow-men. There are, for the most of these usual directions, limiting or exceptional cases where the normal 'rule' of human behaviour undergoes a kind of teleological suspension under the impact of the immediate action of Christ in the Holy Spirit " (Robert E. Willis, The Ethics of Karl Barth, p. 425; see also James M. Gustafson, "Context Versus Principles: A Misplaced Debate in Christian Ethics," New Theology No. 3, ed. Marty and Peerman (1966), pp. 88, 91). A reading of Barth's volume on special ethics (III/4) surely verifies Willis' statement.

1. To Will and To Do, pp. 205-6, 304. "The intervention of the Holy Spirit can push us to action which is quite outside the rules and norms. It can incite us to novelty, to innovation. And on that occasion no moral judgment should enter in. We do not have the right to erect a morality for the purpose of preventing the intervention of the Holy Spirit..." (ibid., p. 214). "Ethics should include this prohibition of the a priori response, and thus should leave complete latitude to enable the response that we give today to be different from that of yesterday, which does not mean that yesterday's was bad " (ibid., p. 259).

2. The Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 65-6.

speak of the law as a lower limit, they are only claiming this for some aspects of biblical law which seem authoritative to them for now. Both men regard the content of the law as open to discussion within the Christian community. In practice, Barth holds open the possibility of divinely granted exceptions to almost every general moral teaching of Scripture which he discusses.[1]

The Law As Instructional Preparation

Barth has another way of utilizing biblical moral teachings. Here biblical moral injunctions are used more as instructional preparation for hearing God's concrete Word than as lower limits of the law. Here he speaks of biblical commands as the context in which God speaks a Word which is likely to have a different range of meanings to different people. Barth's use of biblical injunctions in this way is quite in harmony with much that Ellul has said about the flexible nature of the Christian life. Ellul does refer approvingly to this aspect of Barth's thought. He cites II/2, pp. 634-5 and concludes that the biblical requirements of God must be understood as points of departure and not tangible givens.[2]

Barth utilizes this aspect of his thought mainly in the context of giving an exposition of the meaning of Jesus' call to discipleship and the meaning of various specific commands Jesus is said to have

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1. See Barth III/4 We cannot claim that Barth's statements are always selfconsistent. For example, he at one place says that the Ten Commandments indicate that which must not "in any circumstances" be done (II/2, p. 684-5). How could these words be differentiated from the "casuistry" which Barth and Ellul reject? See also III/4, pp. 423ff., for another example of a more legalistic statement than we would expect. All we can claim is that when we look at the general thrust of what Barth and Ellul say it seems that they do not intend to offer infallible absolutes.

2. To Will and To Do, p. 310; see also p. 248. Ellul tells us that there is no conflict between the objective revelation in the Bible and the revelation hic et nunc. He admits, however, that though the Holy Spirit makes contemporary past revelation and though past revelation/...

addressed to particular individuals. Here Barth's concern to emphasize the concreteness of God's commanding activity comes to the fore. He exegetes the historical meaning of concrete commands, then lifts up a general direction indicated by several such commands, and then invites the reader to ask himself what, specifically, God is commanding in this regard today.

Here Barth does not tell us that our conduct should be above a lower limit of the law. He tells us that our discipleship must be shaped by the picture of discipleship defined by Jesus' calls to particular men in the past.[1] In this aspect of Barth's thought, he even speaks of the Sermon on the Mount not as an aspect of Christian tradition which indicates lines of action which we ought to take into consideration as we seek directly to be obedient to God.[2] Here the emphasis is even more on concrete obedience to a living Commander, rather than on allegiance to past commands; thus, his distinction between the law and the commandment comes to the fore. Past commands become valuable as they help us to listen for God's concrete command today.[3] The commands of the past are not seen to be legally binding,

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revelation is to be used to help interpret God's command today — it is nevertheless the case that the moral revelation of the Bible does not have a direct ethical meaning for today (To Will and To Do, pp. 263-4). We are not to use the Bible in a way which implies a non-belief in God's guidance here and now. God does not in most cases command us in precisely the same way he commanded men in the past. But he commands us in precise ways today only as we are alerted to the shape of His commanding activity by a careful study of His revelation as witnessed to in Scripture. "We are not only called to act by analogy with biblical circumstances, but it turns out that the God who spoke to men in the Bible is also our own God, and directly ours, thanks to their witness " (ibid., p. 274; see also p. 204).

1. Barth IV/2, p. 552.

2. Barth II/2, pp. 699-700.

3. James M. Gustafson argues that Barth understands biblical ethics as pointing more to the revealed reality of God rather than as indicating a revealed morality (James M. Gustafson, Christian Ethics & the Community (1971) pp. 48-51). "For Karl Barth, the Bible first of all points toward the living God, known in Jesus Christ/...

but instructionally necessary.[1] We are not to imitate past patterns of conduct, but to respond appropriately today as men responded appropriately to Christ in the past:-

> To be sure the call of Jesus will be along the lines /my underlines/ of the encounter between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world. ... But this does not mean that the living Son of Man is confined as it were to the sequence of his previous encounters, or that his commanding moves only in the circle of His previous commanding and the obedience which it received. It is not for us simply to reproduce these pictures. That is to say, it is not for us to identify ourselves directly with those who were called then, and therefore to learn directly from what they were commanded what we are necessarily commanded, or from their obedience what our own obedience must be. We will always know that it is His voice which calls us from the fact that in what is demanded of us we shall always have to do with a break with the great self-evident factors of our environment, and therefore the world as a whole, which will have to be made in fact, both outwardly and inwardly along the lines indicated in the New Testament, corresponding to, and attesting, the irruption of the kingdom of God. In other words, we shall have to do with a form of the free activity, which Paul describes in the imperative of Rom. 12:2... [2]

Christ, and thus what is required of ethics is obedience to a Person, not a proposition, or in the language of H. Richard Niebuhr, response to a person, and not to a rule " (James M. Gustafson, Christian Ethics & the Community, p. 49; see also p. 99). We can accept Gustafson's observation if we add the proviso that for Barth there can be no response to the Person of Christ without a serious wrestling with the theological and moral propositions of Scripture about the ways of Christ. Gustafson, though an astute interpreter of Barth's ethic, has the tendency to emphasize Barth's existential side and minimize the salvation history aspect of Barth's ethical thought. Gustafson does not discuss the way in which Barth uses the law as a rather firm lower limit.

We can also basically agree with the following statement by Robert E. Willis, if we add the proviso just mentioned. Willis writes, "The accent in the notion of command thus falls consistently on the way in which God in Jesus Christ is present to man as the living and acting God whose impingement on the human is immediate, continuous, and explicit... The command brings us face to face with the person of God himself. It is thus impossible to interpose the command between man and God as though it were an independent third entity, a kind of formal receptacle whose elaboration and application is left to the discretion of human self-determination" (Robert E. Willis, The Ethics of Karl Barth, p. 184).

1. Barth III/4, p. 18.
2. Barth IV/2, pp. 552-3.

Barth indicates that the study of biblical examples is the necessary homework for hearing God's Word today, but that God's Word today is not a mere repetition of biblical examples. He admits that Christ might demand the same of us as He demanded of those first disciples.[1] "But again — along the same lines — He may just as well

> command something different, possibly much more, or the same thing in a different application and concretion. In these circumstances it might well be disobedience to be content to imitate them, for if we are to render simple obedience it must be to the One who, as He called them then, calls us today."[2]

James M. Gustafson has a generally excellent understanding of Barth's use of the moral teachings of Scripture, though he does not mention the fact that Barth sometimes speaks of the law as a kind of

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1. Barth IV/2, p. 553.

2. Barth IV/2, p. 553. An example of Barth's more relative use of biblical law is the way he utilizes various biblical teachings about wealth. Barth realizes that Jesus is said to have on occasion asked men to totally abandon their possessions (Mk. 10:21), but Barth does not believe that such a teaching should be offered as a general ideal. Rather, he discovers a general direction present in all of Jesus' words about wealth. He tells us that Jesus' call to discipleship asks us to renounce our "general attachment to the authority, validity and confidence of possessions, not merely inwardly but outwardly, in the venture and commitment of a definite act " (Barth IV/2, p. 548). After having stated an array of biblical teachings with reference to wealth (Mtt. 5:42; 6:24; Mk. 10:21,28) he concludes: "The drift of them all is clearly that Jesus' call to discipleship challenges and indeed cuts right across the self-evident attachment to that which we possess. The man to whom the call of Jesus comes does not only think and feel but acts (here and now, in this particular encounter with his neighbour) as one who is freed from this particular attachment" (IV/2, p. 548). Barth does not use the biblical teachings about wealth to establish a Christian law. Rather, he deduces a kind of generalization as providing the context in which we are to listen for the specific Word of God for our own lives. He does the same thing with reference to other synoptic moral teachings. Concerning fame and honour, he concludes: "All this can hardly be formulated, let alone practiced, as a general rule for improved social relationships. It is again clear that these sayings assume the existence of men who are freed by the concretely given command of Jesus from the usual dominion and constraint of ordinary conceptions of what constitutes social status and dignity and importance " (Barth IV/2, p. 549; see below, p. 326, n. 3).

lower limit. Gustafson rightly refers to Barth's use of biblical law to determine the general direction of God's commanding activity as using the Bible as a source of analogies:[1]

> The formula might be expressed in the following terms. As the act of Jesus in cleansing the temple was an obedient act of witnessing to God's gracious power in that situation, so my act of obedience in a comparable modern situation might be similar. But it might not be! The key is not what was done, but the obedience in which it was done.[2]

> Jesus' teachings are, in a sense, pointers; they show the direction in which human behaviour that is consistent with the message of salvation will go. They are not seen as rules absolutely authoritative and immediately applicable in every situation. They do not provide the sole norms in the light of which moral action is to be judged and guided. Rather, their authority is more instructional than legal, more informing than prescriptive. The teachings do not call for copying; one does not model his life after them in an external way ... The teachings of Jesus point to the kinds of behaviour that will be consistent with the message of redemption.[3]

Evaluation

Looking back over what Barth and Ellul have said about the concreteness of obedience, we might agree that everything that they say about the Christian ethic they understand as instructional

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1. James M. Gustafson, Christ and the Moral Life, pp. 46-48.
2. Ibid., p. 47.
3. Ibid., p. 204; see also Gustafson, "Context Versus Principles," p. 87. "The use of the teachings as direction is more by way of analogy than deduction, more by way of illustration than application, more through how they help one to perceive and understand what action is appropriate than through explicit definition or delineation of appropriate action" (James M. Gustafson, Christ and the Moral Life, pp. 204-5). Barth, without denying the particularity of biblical teachings, is trying to show that the meaning of biblical moral teachings is more general than the specific statements made under specific historical conditions that no longer prevail (ibid., p. 236).

preparation for man's direct obedience to God.[1] This is true, but there is a complexity which lies hidden within this general statement. We might begin to understand this complexity by looking at a statement which Emil Brunner once made. Brunner argued that ethics, like the law, can only prepare the way for hearing the divine command.[2] He wrote:-

> By itself ethics can decide nothing beforehand; nothing at all. But, by the consideration of all the points of view which have to be considered by one who knows God's grace and God's demand, the Divine revelation in the Scripture and the Spirit, ... it can prepare the decision of the individual as carefully as a conscientious legal advisor prepares the decision of the judge by the most careful consideration of all possibilities.[3]

Using Brunner's illustration we can address questions to Barth, Ellul, and even Brunner himself.

Every attorney knows that his defence of his client is in some

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1. Barth says that special ethics has to do with a consideration of the constancy and continuity of the divine command and human action (III/4, p. 17-18), yet he goes on to say of special ethics: "Its function or service in this formed reference is not to pronounce an anticipatory judgment on the good or evil of human action in encounter with the command of God, but to give definite instruction with regard to this event. ... Special ethics may thus serve as instructional preparation for the ethical event. And as such instruction it will plainly be distinguished not only from all casuistry but also from an ethics which is satisfied with a formless reference to the God who claims, decides and judges in the ethical event, to the Holy Spirit, or to the 'command of the hour' and such like" (Barth III/4, p. 18). "Ethics will still have to leave the final judgment to God. ... It will certainly offer no less than guidance if it adheres to the text prescribed. But more than guidance will not be expected from even the most particular ethics, just as more than guidance to a knowledge of Christian truth, more than an Institutio religionis christianae, will not be expected from even the most precise and detailed dogmatics. In both cases what is more than guidance will be either arbitrary human assertion or the event of the revelation of which only God Himself can be the subject. True dogmatics and true ethics steer a middle course — between what they must not be and what they cannot be. They do what can and should be done by man in the light of revelation. They give well-founded and legitimate witness, and therefore training in Christianity, and in the particular case of ethics training in keeping the command " (Barth III/4, p. 31).

2. Emil Brunner, The Divine Imperative, pp. 90-91.

3. Ibid., p. 139.

cases on firmer ground than in other cases. That is, sometimes he is relatively certain what the judge's verdict will be; in other cases he is far from certain. In all cases the attorney and his client must await the judge's verdict. Just as there can be degrees of certainty attached to the legal preparation before a case is heard by the judge, so in Barth's and Ellul's ethical thought there seem to be degrees of givenness attached to past biblical commands. Though in the final analysis both agree that only God's verdict renders an act right or wrong, they imply that they sometimes have a more certain case than other times. Working in all cases from an appreciation of biblical commands, they seem to utilize them in at least two fundamentally different ways.[1] In cases such as adultery and murder (Barth), or even tithing (Ellul), they seem to think that the possibility that God will take exception to His past commands is rather remote. In other cases, past commands are read more like provocative illustrations. Because there is a wide spectrum of givenness attached to past commands, one sometimes gets the feeling that Ellul and Barth are extreme contextualists; at other points one gets the feeling that they are quite firm. Most of all, one is puzzled how they can say things which sound so different and seemingly contradictory. At some points they sound more like existentialists and at others more like salvation history ethicists.[2]

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1. The dividing line between these two ways of understanding the law is not sharply defined by either Barth or Ellul, nor is this distinction itself spelled out to any great extent. Our argument is simply that when one studies what they have said about the law, this sort of distinction is a legitmate inference.

2. Gerhard von Rad greatly influenced Barth and influenced Ellul to some extent (and certainly influenced Ellul indirectly through Barth). Many of the ideas we have been talking about can be traced back to von Rad. Ellul cites his agreement with von Rad that ultimately the concepts and commandments of the Old Testament have to do with a relationship with God and thus do not represent primarily moral content and certainly not moral content which could become the basis for a Christian casuistry (To Will and To Do, pp.216,305). Actually/...

Though it would be tempting to argue that the complexity evidenced in Barth's and Ellul's position is a sign that they are wrong, I think that it is, in the final analysis, a sign that they are right![1] They end up where they do because they are striving to be faithful to the God of Scripture. The God of Scripture has spoken in Christ, and His moral revelation cannot be brushed aside in the manner of a radical situation ethic. The God of Scripture is also the Holy Spirit, who did not stop speaking with the canonization of the Bible. To be faithful to this God, we have to be responsive both to His past revelation and to His freedom to speak a new Word of moral guidance. If God is a living God, Barth and Ellul are surely right in thinking that all ethical formulations must be relativized

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Actually, von Rad evidences the same ambiguities that we are trying to make sense of in Barth and Ellul. He points out how ancient Israel regarded the will of God as extremely flexible, as again and again adjusting itself to meet new situations (Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. 1, p. 199). Barth and Ellul follow him by speaking of the commandments as God's specific commands to particular people.

Barth and Ellul are also of one mind with von Rad in arguing that the whole of God's demands are not embodied in the law. Von Rad pointed out that in ancient Israel there was a wide field of moral action left unregulated by the law. He said that ancient Israel lacked precisely what was necessary for law in the narrow sense, namely a positive filling out of God's expectations. He observed that, with two exceptions, the Ten Commandments confine themselves to basic negations and amount to mere signposts, showing God's minimal demands (von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. 1, pp. 194-5).

Like Barth and Ellul, von Rad seems to take back a bit of what he said about the flexibility of the law when he speaks of the law as a kind of inflexible lower limit. He frankly admits that in the Old Testament God's saving event was seen to be "indissolubly bound up with the obligation to obey certain norms." He observed that the same held true in the early Church (von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. 2. pp. 391-392).

If one is to consistently interrelate von Rad's exegetical discoveries, one needs to correlate a kind of existentialist identification of God's will with the present event of God's demand, with a salvation history understanding of the givenness of past law.

1. This is not to overlook the fact that both men have the annoying habit of first overstating one side of their case and then the other. For example, see Barth's rather legalistic statement in II/2, pp. 684-5. See an equally legalistic statement by Ellul in The Politics of God, p. 195. We are not claiming that every statement can be consistently related to every other statement, but that when one looks at the whole of/...

and stated in such a way as to leave open the direct guidance and judgment of God.[1] If the living God has spoken in the past, they are right in insisting that the Christian ethic must be more than a formal reference to God's ability to command in the immediate situation.

In addition to being responsive to the biblical understanding of God, Barth and Ellul are also responsive to the actual diversity present in various biblical moralities.[2] As those who live before God,

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of what Barth and Ellul write about ethics, it begins to make sense in the way we will presently suggest.

1. To Will and To Do, pp. 259-305.
Having learned of the freedom of God in Scripture, Barth insists that scriptural inspiration has to do with the event in which God encounters man (Barth I/1, pp. 123, 151-5; I/2, p. 527). The Bible is the necessary means of grace for this encounter (since it alone witnesses to God's revelation in Christ), but it is not itself seen to be revelation (Barth, I/2, pp. 512, 530ff.; Jerome Hamer, Karl Barth, pp. 94-5). "For me the Word of God is a happening, not a thing. Therefore the Bible must become the Word of God, and it does this through the work of the Spirit " (Barth, Table Talk, p.26).
Both Ellul and Barth understand the Word of God as more dialectically related to the words of Scripture than does orthodoxy. The difference has to do with a greater appreciation of the freedom of God in personal revelation on the part of these men. Though the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and other biblical moral teachings help us to perceive God's will, God's will is seen to be the personal and concrete claiming of our lives --- which only the living God can effect (To Will and To Do, p. 222).
On the doctrine of Scripture, both Barth and Ellul seek an intermediate position between a spiritualism, which minimize the biblical message, and an orthodox literalism, which freezes the meaning of God's demand in a code from the past (Jerome Hamer, Karl Barth, p. 24). From the doctrine of Scripture shared by them we would expect a Christian ethic which strives to be deeply biblical, while at the same time seeking to avoid legalism. The ethical position both men arrive at is an integral aspect of their understanding of the proper way to interpret Scripture. They believe that the message of God is truly to be sought in the words of Scripture, not behind the words of Scripture (contrary to Barth's more Platonic method in his early commentary on Romans). Thus the Christian ethic has to do with a careful listening to the message of Scripture in its moral and theological aspects. Since the words of Scripture are not equated with the Word of God, not all biblical moral words are to be given equal authority in determining the Christian ethic. Spiritual judgements are called for. Likewise, since the words of Scripture are not equated with the Word of God, God's Word today is not seen to be a mere repetition of His past words.

2. The diversity of biblical moralities raises the problem of the subjective choice from among various biblical moralities, at least as to/...

they are Christian witnesses. They seek to repeat what they have heard from God as they have studied the Bible. What they believe they have heard is in some cases that there is very little likelihood that God is going to grant exceptions to the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, etc. They cannot rule out unusual borderline cases — still, they want these to remain borderline cases. Here they come very close to affirming divine rules with the possibility of divinely granted exceptions. What they believe they have heard in other cases is much more relativistic and flexible, a command which, when interpreted, means different things to different people. Yet, in the final analysis, both Ellul and Barth want us to know that their findings are but the report of what they believe they have heard from God as they have studied Scripture.[1] Thus, we are invited to critically assess what they have said in the light of our own openness to the God of Jesus Christ.

For Ellul and Barth, the whole effort of Christian ethics is very much a spiritual task. Obedience is involved in the selection of biblical moral commands which still embody God's claim for today. Obedience is involved in seeking to distinguish between those commands which seem relatively firm and those which are of a more relative (though important) nature. And obedience is involved in seeking to live in the wide area of human life which is not directly covered by past biblical injunctions.

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to which aspects are to be regarded as authoritative for today. Ellul's ethical theory cannot avoid this problem of subjectivity, but then neither can any Christian ethic which attempts to take seriously the freedom of God and which rejects the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. The Christian must differentiate between the valid and the non-valid in the law. The obligation to practise such criticisms is surely implied in Paul's statement that we must prove what is the good and acceptable will of God (Rom. 12:2), that we must distinguish what is truly important from what is less so (Phil. 1:10) (Bultmann, Theology, Vol. 1, p. 341). Likewise, the obligation to discern the important from the unimportant is implied in Jesus' rejection of aspects of Old Testament legal tradition.

1. We must remind ourselves that neither man believes there is a rational hermeneutical method which can enable one to move from a study of Scripture to a statement of God's will for today (To Will and To Do, p. 210).

CHAPTER V

CHAPTER V

THE PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: FAITHFUL WITNESS TO JESUS CHRIST

The Christian's Unique Manner and Purpose

Jacques Ellul believes that the purpose of the Christian life is to be radically obedient to Jesus Christ and in so doing to witness to Christ in word and deed. It is true that in a formal way he, like many other Christians, defines the goal of Christian existence in missionary terms. However, what fills his formal definition with content is his belief that only that conduct consistent with the Gospel can truly witness to it.[1] His position can be understood only if we keep in mind both his definition of the purpose of Christian life and the way he interprets that purpose. Were we to speak of the Christian's evangelical goal apart from a stress on the necessity of using means consistent with that goal, we would be representing the very stance Ellul opposes!

To understand Ellul's missionary position we need to relate it to what he has already said about the eschatological nature of the Christian life. From his eschatological understanding, we know that what he sees as important is Christian integrity, a quality of faithfulness which manifests the reality of the future Kingdom to which Christians adhere.[2] Likewise, he interprets the task of Christian witness in this context, insisting that Christians witness by striving to represent the presence of the Kingdom in history. His ends-means reasoning asserts that the

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 22.
2. Ibid., pp. 50-51.

end sought must be present in the means used.[1] Just as Jesus did not use ungodly means to attain even worthy ends,[2] likewise Christians are obligated to pursue the goal of witnessing to the future Kingdom with methods consistent with that Kingdom.[3] Just as Jesus' life revealed the realized presence of the Kingdom and thus provided the true witness to the Kingdom, the Christian's life is to represent the realized presence of the Kingdom — so that others may come to believe in Christ. Methods inconsistent with the Gospel do not provide a true witness, even if they are outwardly "successful". Unless God's revelation in Christ is mistaken, only those methods reflective of the Kingdom truly witness to it. Along these same lines Ellul argues that it is above all the means which we use which are most visible to others, and which thus provide the real centre of evangelical concern.[4]

Ellul can at one point totally separate the purpose of Christian witness from everything other than the manifestation of Christian integrity.[5] At this one point, he denies that the Christian life involves the pursuit of any objective, but is entirely the manifestation of the life of grace. In the light of his numerous statements defining the purpose of Christian life as witness, this statement perhaps could

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1. See above, pp. 83-87.

2. The Politics of God, p. 114; False Presence, pp. 41-42.

3. "Théologie Dogmatique et Spécificité du Christianisme," Foi et Vie (April-Sept. 1971), p. 147.

4. "We must always be aware of the important truth that our means are the thing which creates opacity between God and men, far more so than our person. What constitutes the veil, the misunderstanding, is what we choose as the instrument of action, of mediation, of intervention, of influence. For it is by this that men finally judge. This is what men see, resent, understand, and experience; nothing else, and certainly not our intentions" (The Politics of God, pp. 117-118).

5. "God loves us because he is love and not to get results. Our works are thus given a point of departure and they are not in pursuit of an objective /my underline/. If we act, it is because God has loved us, because we have been saved, because God's Spirit dwells in us, because we have received revelation, and not at all in order that we may be saved or that others may be converted ..." (The Politics of God, pp. 197-8).

have been more carefully formulated. What he apparently means is that the Christian life pursues no objective other than that of manifesting the reality of grace. His general thought is that God can and does lead people to faith in Christ through Christian witness, but that "conversion" is God's responsibility and the quality of witness is the Christian's concern (not that the latter can be done apart from the guidance of the Spirit). One might say that the Christian goal is to provide a faithful witness to Jesus Christ and God's goal is to use this witness in His own way to bring people to faith.[1] Ellul recognizes that there is a broken or dialectical relationship between Christian words and deeds and the convincing power of the Holy Spirit. This recognition is very important to his thinking. If man thought he could convert others, he would be tempted to use methods which seem humanly "effective", rather than those most faithful to the Gospel proclaimed. If man could convert others, he would be tempted to use immoral means to attain such a worthy end.[2]

When we discussed Ellul's eschatological interpretation we noticed that it leads to a stress on conduct which is uniquely Christian. He speaks similarly of the evangelical purpose of the Christian life. He argues that the Christian's unique role in everything that he does is to

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1. "If the man to whom we bear witness is saved, it is neither by encounter with us, nor by our words, nor because of our self-giving, but because God has chosen to love man as the expression of his self-love" (The Politics of God, p. 180).

2. Because Ellul puts such emphasis on the quality of Christian witnese, his position is entirely different from a kind of superficial obsession with the statistics of salvation. He is concerned about the quality of witness, that conversion may be truly Christian. His stance is diametrically opposed to those who minimize the importance of the integrity of witness for the sake of getting the largest possible number of people happily registered on Church rolls.
   Karl Barth pointed out that great membership rolls and good Church attendance are not necessarily a sign that a faithful Christian witness has been made. He, however, went on to argue that an empty Church is not necessarily a sign of faithful Christian witness either (Barth IV/1, pp. 708-710).

be a missionary who introduces that which is specifically Christian into the life of the world.[1] Because the Christian is so single-mindedly committed to this one task, he can be freed from the "realism" which dominates the world's way of acting. Were the Church's task to improve the world, she would need to use the most "effective" means rather than the means most faithful to the Gospel.[2]

Reinhold Niebuhr was no more "realistic" than Ellul in his assessment of the world. However, because he was committed to the goal of world improvement, he was willing to define the social purpose of the Christian life as that of seeking the relatively best options offered by the world (of course, as measured by the "norm" of love). Ellul, the social realist, is a Christian evangelical, who understands the Christian's missionary purpose in "perfectionistic" terms. (This word is never used by Ellul and is used by us only to denote a stress on the importance of consistency between the witness and the One to whom he witnesses, the belief that we can witness to Christ only insofar as we strenuously strive to be obedient to His will.)[3] Unlike Reinhold Niebuhr's theology and even more unlike secular theology, Ellul's whole ethic is the expression of his conviction about the unique role of Christians in God's relationship with the world[4] and his belief that Christian methods must conform to the Gospel proclaimed. Put the opposite way, Christians are to realize the meaning of Christian existence and in so doing witness to Christ.

Since we have begun this section by stating the context in which

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1. Violence, p. 28.
2. Propaganda, p. 231.
3. "If ... means cannot be invested with power except as they are congruent with the gospel, we are always obligated to raise the question 'why' and 'for whom' (The Politics of God, p. 137).
4. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 8-9, 23-4; Violence, pp. 26, 45-6.

the Christian purpose must be understood (perfectionism) if we are to do justice to Ellul's thought, we must now go on to show that he most definitely does believe that the sole purpose of Christian life is to witness faithfully to Christ, that God may lead people to obedient faith.[1] The Christian life can take on a quality of "otherness" over against all worldly options, precisely because Christians are called and enabled to pursue a unique task which others do not know. With methods imposed by the task itself, Christians are to reject the realistic methods of the world, not because Christians are unrealistic or naive, but because they are to witness to a transcendent possibility, a Kingdom not of this world.

Ellul insists that the Church must claim the right to proclaim the Word of God in deed as well as in word.[2] Though he stresses the hidden covenant basis of the Christian life, he nevertheless thinks that Christians are to be visible signs of the new covenant God has made with the world in Jesus Christ. Though he puts great emphasis on Christ as the source of all Christian meaning, nevertheless he says of Christians, "You are the light of the world."[3] "'Even so let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.'"[4] When Ellul says that Christians have an

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1. "We must insist rigorously that the preaching of the Gospel has as its sole meaning the hope that a person should come to know the grace available to him in Jesus Christ, that through this he should come to recognize that Jesus is truly the Christ, the Saviour, the Lord, in other words, that this person might be converted to the true God. The presence vis-à-vis the world of Christians and the Church, the presence in the midst of men, has no meaning, no value, no truth, unless it brings a person to this conversion" (False Presence, pp. 105-6). This sentence is not carefully worded; read in isolation one might get the impression that Christians convert others. Read in the context of Ellul's total thought, it is certain that he does not mean that Christians convert, but only that through Christian witness God converts.

2. Theological Foundation of Law, p. 132.

3. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 9.

4. Matthew 5:16, cited in Presence of the Kingdom, p. 22.

"apologetic" task, he means that they by their life-conduct are to reflect the Gospel so that others may come to know the God in whom they believe.[1]

Though Ellul stresses the importance of proclamation through life example, he does not minimize the importance of verbal interpretation. (He does, however, insist that such witness can be humanly convincing only as people can see that the witness is striving to be obedient to the One to whom he witnesses.)[2] In good Reformation tradition, he insists that the Church's purpose is the preaching of the Word.[3] He believes that the Word which the Church has to announce is the "revealed truth" of Jesus Christ,[4] or, more specifically, Christ's death and resurrection.[5] Because he believes that the content of the Christian witness is Jesus Christ and not the Christian's own moral life, verbal interpretation is seen as important, so that others will be pointed away from the Christian to Christ, the source of the Christian's being. Only Christocentric verbal interpretation can guard against moralistic self-glorification.

Ellul forces no choice between evangelism through words or deeds,

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1. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 22-23.
2. Ibid., p. 145.
3. "Note Problématique sur l'Histoire de l'Eglise," Foi et Vie (July-August 1949), p. 300. Ellul criticizes the notion that the verbal proclamation of the Gospel should wait until the problem of world poverty is solved (A Critique, pp. 179-180). "When a theologian defends this doctrine, he is explicitly condemning Jesus Christ, who should have waited until all men had enough to eat before he came and preached, or should at least have proclaimed his Gospel to someone besides the poor people of Judaea!" (ibid., p. 180). Ellul is not denying that Jesus had concern for the poor nor is he denying that Christians should have such concern. He, for example, criticizes the rich who refuse to help the poor but send spiritual aid (Violence, p. 38). He is simply insisting that the preaching mission of the Church must continue no matter what the external situation of the world. The man who is hungry has moral and spiritual problems as well as physical ones (A Critique, p. 180).
4. "Note Problématique," p. 305.
5. False Presence, p. 33.

but insists on the importance of both, while recognizing that God is free to utilize our witness (of both kinds) as He sees fit.

By saying that the purpose of the Christian life is to witness, Ellul stands diametrically opposed to those who see the purpose of Christian life as self-contained. He, like Barth, believes that the purpose of Christian existence is missionary existence for others, not the glorification of one's converted state. That is, the purpose of the Christian life is witness, not self-realization. Or, more precisely, Christian self-realization occurs as a by-product (not the purpose) of Christian existence.[1]

Without attempting to evaluate the many aspects of Ellul's position which we have only hinted at as yet and which will be further developed in the following sections, it can be said that he offers a helpful corrective to the tendency of much current theology to conform to the world and to deny the significance of the Church's mediatorial role with reference to the world. In the New Testament the Church surely does have a significant role and a good deal of New Testament tradition can be marshalled to support Ellul's belief that that purpose is precisely to

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1. "Now when God speaks to a man, it is never for his personal satisfaction, for the sake of his soul or his happiness. The announcement God makes to him is always connected with an order God gives him, a service he expects of him, a mission he lays upon him. And the reply of faith that God expects is that the man will accomplish this mission and service, that he will enter into God's design" (The Politics of God, p. 55). "The call of Jonah, God's patience with him, the pursuit, the order given, the grace accorded, the conversion, were not for Jonah's sake, but for the sake of Nineveh. We sometimes confer too great importance on our individual spiritual or religious life. To be sure, each of us is of infinite worth before God, for he gave his Son to save us. But above all each of us is important for the work which God demands. The Christian is not just the man who is saved by Christ; he is the man whom God uses for the salvation of others by Christ ... The special care which God takes of Jonah is finally, then, his care for the salvation of Nineveh. If Jonah receives a call, if he is truly saved, it is for others. From the moment faith develops in us, we must be permeated by the conviction that if grace is conferred on us it is primarily for others. It is never for our own personal satisfaction. Our salvation and our adventure are functions of the salvation and the adventure of the men around us, and ultimately of the world" (Jonah, pp. 88-89).

witness to Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18-19; Acts 1:8; Gal. 1:15-16; I Pet. 2:9).

Working with a common New Testament definition of the Church, Ellul has shown the truly radical nature of this understanding. In his approach, the whole of the Christian life is simplified to a remarkable degree. Of course, Christians are sinners and they are involved in a lifelong struggle to allow Christ to free them from sin, so they can witness in word and deed. Still, what a difference it would make if Christians could realize their unique raison d'être. What a simplification of the Christian life could occur if Christians realized that amid every activity they must strive to do one thing and one thing only, and to do so in a manner consistent with the goal sought.[1] One wonders if part of the confusion about the Christian life is not due precisely to a lack of clarity about the purpose of Christian existence, a confusion which Jacques Ellul certainly dispels for those who accept his remedy.

It is interesting to note that Karl Barth's understanding of the purpose of the Christian life (while lacking the full development of Ellul's kind of ends-means perfectionism) is basically similar to Ellul's position and provides some theological expansion.[2] There is no doubt that Barth did believe that the controlling purpose of the Christian life is solely that of witnessing to Jesus Christ.[3] He insisted that

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1. "It is not in doing exactly the same as other people, and in carrying out technical work, that the Christian 'participates effectively' in the 'preservation of the world', but in fulfilling his specific rôle ... This does not mean that technical work ought not to be done, or that it is useless, but this work is done by everybody, and it has no meaning unless it is guided, accompanied, and sustained by another work that only the Christian can do, and that he often does not do" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 24).

2. Ellul does make one reference to Barth's thought on evangelism, which has to do with Barth's understanding that the Christian life must attest and confirm the action of God, but not seek to continue or reproduce it (To Will and To Do, p. 258, on p. 309 citing Barth II/2, 577).

3. Barth IV/3, Second Half, pp. 563ff., 767-8.

every Christian is a missionary by virtue of his Christian calling.[1] He was unhappy with what he called "egocentric Christianity", Christianity which sees the purpose of the Christian life as self-contained — the possession of grace — rather than as having to do with missionary witness.[2]

Barth was also critical of those who understood the whole purpose of Christian existence in mere moral terms and who failed to ask the question, "Why be moral? For what purpose?"[3] Both Barth and Ellul insist on the necessity of loving the neighbour, but both interpret love for the neighbour in the context of glorifying God, rather than in a mere humanitarian context. For both men, all Christian activities are to be understood as aspects of the Christian missionary enterprise. Barth said of Christians, "With their whole being, action, inaction and conduct, and then by word and speech, they have to make a definite declaration to other men. The essence of their vocation is that God makes them His witnesses."[4] And again, "The distinction of a human work is to declare the occurrence of the good work of God."[5] Both Barth and Ellul stress the importance of verbal witness, as we would expect of those who hold a Christ-centred faith. Neither man can be faulted for separating witness in word from witness through deeds. Words are needed to interpret the meaning and purpose of deeds, and to point away from ourselves.[6] Deeds are needed to authenticate and to incarnate the Gospel in which we believe. Words and deeds interrelate, each interpreting the other. Barth even stressed the same synoptic metaphors as Ellul,

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1. Barth III/4, p. 505.
2. Barth IV/3, Second Half, pp. 567, 767-768.
3. Ibid., pp. 558-561.
4. Ibid., p. 575.
5. Barth IV/2, p. 589; see also IV/3, Second Half, p. 622.
6. Barth I/2, p. 442.

recognizing the visible aspect of life-witness, while not denying the hidden basis of the Christian life.[1]

Barth gave a clear theological rationale for the necessity of proclamation in words and deeds. He pointed out that in God's act of salvation in Jesus Christ, proclamation occurred in words and deeds, and the two integrally interrelated. Likewise, he said that Jesus called His disciples to this dual proclamation:[2]

> According to Mt. 10:7 they, too, instructed by Jesus, are to proclaim: "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." But their proclamation is also to have the other form: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils" (v. 8). And these two things are what they actually did when they were sent out, as we learn from Mk. 6:12f. and also from Lk. 9:6: "Preaching the gospel and healing everywhere." [3]

Christian Social Witness

In keeping with the general thrust of Ellul's eschatological understanding of the Christian life and his insistence that a witness must seek to conform to the One to whom he witnesses, it comes as no surprise that when he turns to the social realm he once again emphasizes the importance of a uniquely Christian form of witness. Positively, this means that the Christian has an important task here as elsewhere. Negatively, because Ellul believes that there is no standard frame of reference between Christian and non-Christian, he cannot offer a Christian "social ethic"; he cannot give advice to the world because he believes that the world does not share a Christian perspective. Though he defends the importance of Christian obedience to God in the social realm, he cannot argue for the kind of indirect application of Christian values to the social order that is commonly associated with the "social

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1. Barth IV/3, Second Half, p. 763; IV/2, p. 593.
2. Barth IV/3, Second Half, pp. 862-3.
3. Ibid., p. 863.

gospel".[1] However, though he cannot offer Christian advice to the world, the logic of his position allows Christians to join with non-Christians at particular points, if non-believers, acting for their own motives, are in agreement with Christians, acting in faithfulness to God.

In this section we will seek to document our contention that Ellul does affirm the importance of a unique form of Christian social witness.[2] We will also indicate the line of reasoning which lies behind his rejection of the indirect application of Christian values to society, but which sometimes allows Christians to join non-Christians at the level of concrete action. (In our analysis we will simultaneously have regard for these two issues, often considering both in the same connection.)

The only way to show that Ellul does affirm the importance of a uniquely Christian form of social witness is to deal with some of the concrete social proposals which he makes on the basis of uniquely Christian beliefs, or which he argues have been so made in the past. One such example is the abolition of slavery, which he believes was due to the Christian conviction of equality before God based on faith in the second

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1. He says quite frankly that we must have no illusions about the possibility of influencing institutions by Christianity ("Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien," p. 177). "Jesus Christ has not come to bring a schema for the ideal society, and it is a deceptive sentimentalism that believes in an infusion of love into economic or political institutions" (ibid.; see also Protestantisme Français, p. 142).

2. From the perspective of Reinhold Niebuhr's social realism, one might accuse Ellul of minimizing the importance of loving the neighbour by stressing the purity of the ethical agent. However, Ellul is not indifferent to the importance of helping those in need, feeding the hungry, etc. It is, of course, true that he rejects the legitimacy of using what one regards as unchristian methods for the sake of attaining these goals. He reasons that when the Christian does that he denies the neighbour the one true need of his life, a witness to Christ which can lead to faith.

   He differs from Niebuhr both in emphasizing the evangelical purpose of the Christian life and in relating this purpose to a concern for the consistency of Christian conduct with the Gospel proclaimed. It is interesting that Niebuhr himself admits that Jesus had a concern for the purity of the ethical agent (see above, p.84,n.3). If those in the Niebuhrian tradition are to accuse Ellul of a lack of concern for Christian love because of concern for the purity of the ethical agent, they/...

coming of Christ.[1] Though he does not see the changing of society's institutions as the Christian goal, he cites this example to indicate that genuine Christian faith can sometimes have social repercussions. He says that it is quite acceptable to discover institutional reforms, "on condition that this research is the product of our fundamental attitude, and that it is the expression, pure and simple, of the presence of the end of the world ..."[2] In the instance of abolition, Christians simply by adhering to their faith were also able to give a social witness on behalf of Christian truth.[3]

A modern example of Christian social witness has to do with integration. Ellul tells us:-

> We should not ... scorn or disregard the material battle. For example, in the racial conflict, how idle it is to talk about the "integration of hearts" as long as millions of blacks are not integrated into economic life. Thus Christians must reject psychological integration and insist on the importance of economic integration; but their specific task is to carry on the spiritual battle against the demonism of racism.[4]

His argument is apparently that the Christian belief in equality before God necessitates a denial of racism and one aspect of this denial must take the form of support for economic integration. Here again, on the basis of uniquely Christian convictions, one is called to make a social witness.

Ellul does not discuss the fact that non-believers have also supported abolition and racial integration. However, in Chapter One[5] we

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they are in the strange position of having to accuse Jesus of the same. But then who, after all, determines what constitutes Christian love? Is the synoptic witness to be so lightly set aside or compromised?

1. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 84-85.
2. Ibid., p. 84.
3. "Since Christ was about to come, it seemed both useless and unjust to have slaves! Institutional reforms, therefore, ought to spring out of the faith of the Church, and not from the technical competence of a few experts, whether they be Christians or not" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 85.
4. Violence, p. 163.
5. Pp. 36-41 above.

noticed that he does recognize that Christians can sometimes agree with non-Christians at the level of concrete action. What is important for him is that Christians make their decisions on the basis of radical obedience to God. Having done so, they are then free to stand with non-Christians at the points where non-believers, for their own reasons, support the same policies.

There is still a duality in Ellul's position, because he rejects Christian moralistic preaching to the world. If there are particular activities at which Christians and non-Christians can join, because both for separate reasons agree, he believes that there are also many other points where Christians will find no support from the non-believing world. At these other points, the uniqueness of the Christian goal and method will stand out in sharp contrast to the way of the world.

Another example of Ellul's advocacy of a uniquely Christian form of social witness is what he says about Christian involvement on behalf of the poor. Though non-believers may, for their own reasons, also have concern for the poor, it is unlikely that the exact form of Ellul's proposals would appeal to them. Here is an example of where the uniquely Christian basis of his social position would seem to have the effect of leading Christians to advocate a position which is not likely to gain wide support from other groups in society.

When speaking of Christian concern for the poor, Ellul is very careful to base his position on a normative Christian conviction. Instead of appealing to some mere humanitarianism, he says that the motivation for Christian concern for the poor is the belief in the Incarnation and a following of the specific ways of Jesus Christ. The Christian should stand with the poor, because of "his communion with the Poor One, who knew total poverty, total injustice, total violence. But when the Christian consciously keeps faith with his Lord, he is led to the least of these, the brethren of the Lord, and to the Lord himself

(Matt. 25:40ff.)."[1]

Having accepted a Christocentric motivation, Ellul immediately begins to say things which are offensive to many who have other motives for concern for the poor. For example, he rejects an idealizing of the poor, whereby norms are derived from them, rather than from Jesus Christ. When the poor are idealized, the Church no longer has a critical stance with reference to the use of non-Christian methods, violence in particular. Having rejected the idealizing of the poor, Ellul is free to reject violence. For normative reasons he believes that Christians must stand with the poor without resorting to violence.[2] Many "leftists" will accuse Ellul of indifference to the poor, because he is not willing to resort to violence on their behalf. His answer is simply that he has a Christian concern for the poor, which means that he can help the poor only in those ways which are consistent with his ultimate loyalty to Christ and which enable him to accomplish the purpose for which he exists.

"Leftists" will also be offended at Ellul's insistence that Christian concern must be for the "really poor" and not for the "interesting poor" whose aid furthers the interests of the political left.[3] He argues for the very opposite of a politicized definition of the poor. He

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1. Violence, p. 135; see also p. 30. See below, pp. 327-333.

2. Violence, pp. 24, 38, 135, 153. "I hold that in every situation of injustice and oppression, the Christian — who cannot deal with it by violence — must make himself completely a part of it as representative of the victims" (ibid., pp. 151-152). Ellul points out that the Church has all too often counselled the poor to be submissive, without at the same time "constraining the rich to serve the poor" (ibid., pp. 150-151).

3. Ibid., pp. 66-7, 153. "The interesting poor are those whose defense is in reality an attack against Europe, against capitalism, against the U.S.A. The uninteresting poor represent forces that are considered passé. Their struggle concerns themselves only. They are fighting not to destroy a capitalist or colonialist regime, but simply to survive as individuals, as a culture, a people" (ibid., p. 67).

thinks the really poor are those without defenders, those whose interests are of concern only to those who love, not for the sake of political advantage, but because of Christ. He believes that for political reasons the "interesting poor" will always have defenders; he calls the Church to the unique task of defending the forgotten poor.[1]

Ellul goes on to offer three specific strategy proposals of ways to stand with the really poor today. First, he thinks that Christians should be the spokesmen for the poor, representing their needs to the rich.[2] He believes that Christians are called to be defence attorneys for the poor, doing such things as talking with corporation heads about the plight of their workers.[3] The recommendation here is a good one, but hardly applicable to the whole Church. A Christian so involved would have to be a highly educated person gifted in verbal abilities. What Ellul suggests is an activity more applicable to Church leaders rather than all Christians.

That this proposal is applicable only to the highly verbal segment of the Church is indicated by the fact that he makes the very same proposal to Christian attorneys. He argues that Christian lawyers should realize love for their neighbours by defending those clients who have little chance of having their legal rights represented, the poor, minority groups, and those without power.[4]

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1. See below, pp. 197-208, for Ellul's tendency to interpret Christian love in a one-sidedly personalistic way. As related to the issue under consideration, the problem is that he tends to divorce Christian concern for the poor from Christian participation in social groups seeking to help the poor and from support for social programmes ("Le Pauvre," Foi et Vie (March-April 1951), p. 124).

2. "If the Christian acts as mediator or advocate, as representative of the poor ... it is to plead the cause of absolute misery before absolute power (power is always absolute!), and to do this in a spirit of imperturbably calm and loving intransigence, without animosity or violence" (Violence, p. 152).

3. Ibid., pp. 151-2.

4. "Propositions concernant l'Attitude Chrétienne envers le Droit," Foi et Vie (Jan.-Feb. 1959), pp. 42-43; "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," pp. 32-33.

One might think that Ellul is a bit inconsistent in arguing that the Church should preach to rich and poor alike,[1] but that Christian lawyers should be so one-sidedly concerned to help the poor. He, however, is not inconsistent at this point. He affirms that Christian attorneys should be one-sidedly concerned for the poor because he is convinced that those who have money and power will be able to gain a fair defence without Christian aid. The rich, of course, could not receive Christian proclamation were the Church simply to preach to the poor.

A second recommendation Ellul makes for standing with the poor is that if a particular group wins its revolutionary struggle for power, Christians must immediately switch sides. He believes that once in power the victors will oppress the victims.[2] If one is to stand with the really poor, one cannot idealize some particular group of people. The poor are the oppressed, and once people cease to be oppressed, they are no longer truly poor.[3]

Ellul has a third line of reasoning, a third suggestion for the way in which the Church can stand with the really poor. He believes that Christians ought not to identify with groups which number their supporters in the millions. For example, since the Negroes in America have millions of supporters for their cause, he thinks that the Church should seek to help the more forgotten groups — such as the American Indians.[4]

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1. "Le Pauvre," p. 117; see also False Presence, p. 35.

2. Violence, pp. 138-9.

3. In order to make this point Ellul has to admit that Christians sometimes find that for human reasons they must engage in violence, thus sinning against God. It is interesting that though he is neither trying to give a Christian defence of violence, nor encouraging Christians to support violent movements, he still offers concrete advice to Christians who find themselves in the position of having supported violence (which on Ellul's terms can never be given a Christian defence). Of course, Ellul found himself in this very position after World War II (Violence, pp. 138ff.; see below, pp. 366-371).

4. Ibid., pp. 154-5. Oddly enough, earlier in the same book Ellul seemed to include the American negro in the category of the really poor. He wrote,/...

His argument is related to his belief that the Church should give a creative lead in social action, rather than merely tagging along with the world's programmes. Related to his position is his belief that the Church's social action should move beyond ideological bondage. A group, such as the older people of a society, may desperately need the Church's sponsorship. Such a group may not possess the revolutionary glamour of the interesting poor.

Also related to Ellul's position is his belief that the Church should seek to be freed from bondage to propaganda. The interesting poor are those who have propaganda instruments actively eliciting support for their causes. He calls the Church to defend those who have no such propaganda machinery acting on their behalf.[1]

If we were to take Ellul's third point literally, the Church would, in fact, be negatively determined by the world's propaganda. She would be resolved only to advocate those causes which have no public advocate. As a warning, his point is well taken. As an inflexible rule, it is dangerous. If Christ is the Lord of the world, He may be active through large causes as well as standing in identification with those groups which have few members. Large causes may continue to need Church support as do less popular ones. The fact that a group has public propaganda working for it does not necessarily mean that its needs are being met nor that Christians ought not to have concern for such a group. It may be proper to reverse priorities. It would seem abstract to ignore all movements which number their members in the millions. For example, it would surely be a pity for the Church in America to lose interest in the problem of white racism against the black precisely at the time when even

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wrote, "It is obvious that for the Christian American the black American is 'the poor'; and it is equally obvious that the Christian American must struggle with and for his black brother" (Violence, p. 68).

1. Ibid., pp. 153-4.

white "liberals" are generally losing concern for the black man's plight and when the vision of an integrated society is being abandoned by both white and black. The blackness of the Negro makes his problem of cultural relatedness (due mainly to white prejudice!) uniquely difficult. (Of course, we can agree that the American Church should also express concern for the American Indian.)

Ellul's argument may contain a self-contradiction. His second point had to do with identifying and changing identification with reference to revolutionary groups. Revolutionary groups, however, usually represent large masses of people, numbering their members in the millions.[1]

Whatever the promise and problems of Ellul's position on Christian support for the poor, the point we must not lose sight of is the uniquely Christian angle from which he approaches this subject. Though his advocacy of economic integration will meet with wide support from many humanitarians, the specific proposals he makes concerning Christian involvement with the poor are unlikely to meet with such favourable response from non-Christians.[2] (Perhaps not even from Christians!) We can see that his concern is simply to articulate what he believes to be faithful Christian obedience. He wants to remind Christians of their responsibility, rather than make an indirect application of Christian "values" to the social order.

We now turn to a different issue, that of human law,[3] and look at

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1. We earlier pointed out that the second point was already in contradiction to Ellul's general thought. The fact that it contradicts point number three may be even more of an indication that point number two is not really a Christian suggestion, but reasoning concerning that situation where the Christian has acted in disobedience, supporting a revolution.

2. Another aspect of Ellul's thought which will meet with immense resistance is the notion that Christians must manifest a style of life which manifests an identification with the poor (see below, pp. 327-328).

3. By "human law" we mean the legal tradition embodied in society, which Ellul sharply contrasts with biblical law.

some aspects of Ellul's reasoning about human law, which indicates the duality between the ways of the world and Christian obedience, and shows the inappropriateness of seeking to apply Christian values to secular legal traditions.[1]

Before we proceed, it is important to remember some of the ideas we have discussed earlier, which, when thought through, have the effect of denying the applicability of Christian values to the social order. Why is it that Ellul rejects the indirect application of Christian values to the social order? Why is it that the only point of contact he will allow is that of occasional agreement at the level of concrete activity? His reasoning here basically goes back to his belief in the personal God revealed in Jesus Christ. It is impossible to speak of the application of Christian "values" to the secular order, if Christian values are themselves dependent on the personal activity of the Commander who speaks His law in the context of revealing His presence. If the law is but flexible instructional preparation for hearing God's personal command, it would be a secularization of biblical law to seek to apply it to society at large.[2] The basic God-centredness of Ellul's Christian ethic prevents him from being able to offer a Christian "social ethic" to

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1. We are in no way seeking to give a full exposition of Ellul's many statements about human law, its history of development, etc. Our work is confined to dealing with those aspects of his thought which specifically help us to understand the meaning of the Christian life.

2. He believes that it would be a mistake to follow Calvin in his effort to apply the decalogue to the state (Les Chrétiens et l'Etat, pp. 155-6). Ellul, however, thinks that modern social Christians have misunderstood Calvin's intention. He argues that Calvin was not trying to reform the world, by applying Christian standards to non-believers, and was not confusing the Church with the world. He points out that non-Christians were simply excluded from Geneva (Protestantisme Français, pp. 145-6). Ellul does differ from Calvin in interpreting Old Testament legislation in terms of the particularities of time and place ("Droit," Foi et Vie 19, Nos. 2-3 (1939), pp. 264-5). Ellul and Barth both rebel against a timeless interpretation of biblical commandments and surely do so in part because of the influence of the modern historical study of the Bible (see Barth II/2, p. 684).

society at large. He could offer the latter only if he were willing to understand Christian morality as the application of rules or the effort to approximate principles.

The Christocentric focus of his ethic also eliminates the possibility of the indirect application of Christian values to the world. Ellul believes that the Christian good springs from faith in Jesus Christ and thus is different from the moralities of the world.[1] Those who do not have faith in Christ cannot be expected to fulfil the requirements which flow from that relationship. He writes:-

> One of the essential rules of the Christian life is never to ask a non-Christian to conduct himself like a Christian ... If obedience to the Christian ethic is the loving response of the recipient of grace to him who has shown his love by bestowing grace, then how can one ask a man who has not received, or who did not know that he was under grace, to act as though ... his person were renewed, as though he had experienced grace bestowed upon him, as though he knew that he was the object of God's love?[2]

We also need to note that what Ellul says about human law is really but an application of what he has already said about human morality. We

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1. To Will and To Do, pp. 90, 101.

2. Ibid., p. 104. "What is Christian springs from faith in the person of Jesus Christ. It is impossible to impose the resulting consequences on those who do not share this faith. The desire to create a universally binding law on the basis of the law of God or even on the basis of the Gospel is undeniably heretical. Such an attempt presupposes the possibility, for non-Christians, of accepting the will of God or of living the Christian life" (Theological Foundation of Law, p. 13). "The Christian life can only be the expression of the faith. Whenever you make Christian morality a universal requirement you cut that morality off from its own root and you ask those who do not have the faith to live as though they had it, which means in the last analysis condemning them to hypocrisy" (To Will and To Do, p. 101). "We are in the same dilemma in the scene of public action as in private action. Why should we ask an alcoholic to give up his vice for the sake of Jesus Christ? When you broach this question you realize that there are only two answers: either you appeal to the current morality which is accepted by all — with its extreme weaknesses and tendencies to change — or indeed you witness to Jesus Christ, and you pray for this man's conversion which would be translated into a new way of life" (ibid., p. 106). Ellul agrees that when we proclaim the Gospel we must also proclaim God's demands. He agrees that God's demands are addressed to everyone. But he insists that it is no less true that the Christian way of life is "impossible, incomprehensible, literally meaningless, and unlivable" for those who do not live in Christ (ibid., p. 104).

have seen that he regards human morality as having been created by sinful men; in his view human morality does not transcend man, but expresses various human necessities.[1] In fact, he argues that this autonomous knowledge of good and evil is the very thing that the Bible calls sin.[2] Though non-Christians may sometimes happen to commit acts in agreement with God's intentional will, Ellul is in the dualistic tradition in totally denying that human morality as such has any connection with the Christian good.[3] He sharply contrasts natural ethics (based on mere human choice) with Christian ethics (based on life lived from grace).[4] His conclusion about human morality is that it is both of the order of the fall and of the order of necessity.[5] Though Ellul does not use these exact words with reference to human law, what he does say shows that his opinion on human law is consistent with his view on human morality.

Having considered what seems to us to be the background for Ellul's understanding of the duality between the Church and the world, and the inapplicability of Christianity to the world, we now move to the specific issue of human law (which we believe evidences both the idea of duality and that of inapplicability). When he talks of law he argues that it is strictly human, created by man and not coming from God.[6] He says that just as in the Christian view the state is secular, likewise law is secular. He does not believe that human law expresses either a religious value or divine justice:[7]

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1. To Will and To Do, pp. 103, 112-113.
2. Ibid., pp. 5-19, 42, 271.
3. Ibid., pp. 44-45.
4. Ibid., pp. 297-298.
5. Ibid., pp. 39ff., 59ff.
6. "Propositions," p. 36.
7. Ibid., pp. 36-37. Ellul disagrees with the line of thought which says/...

says that man has an innate sense of divine justice (Theological Foundation of Law, p. 85). (By divine justice he means personal conformity to God's will — ibid., p. 87.) "Our justice has really nothing to do with the justice of God ..." ("Droit," p. 263). He does not deny that there is such a thing as human justice, but insists that human justice is based simply on relative human standards (ibid., pp. 263-4) which vary widely depending on time and circumstance (Theological Foundation of Law, p. 86). (We recall that he said the same thing concerning human morality generally.)

Ellul rejects most theories of natural law, with their claim that man naturally knows the content of divine justice. (He seems to have no objection to those views which recognize the relativity of human law and do not claim to define absolute law — ibid., p. 22.) He sees such beliefs as inconsistent with the Christian claim that the good has to do with the receipt of grace and faith in Jesus Christ ("Propositions," pp. 32-33; Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 65-68). He thinks that such beliefs imply a deistic concept of God (ibid., p. 65). He concludes that "Natural law does not provide any meeting ground for Christians and non-Christians. Although it claims to be a rational creation, it is subject to the divergencies and fluctuations of reason in its concrete application. The only meeting ground for men is found outside themselves, in the everlasting compassion God shows to all of them" (ibid., pp. 69-70). He thinks most natural law theories permit man to escape from the necessity of receiving revelation. Through such theories Christians and non-Christians may come to a common understanding, but they do so by regarding the living God as an irrelevant factor (ibid., p. 11).

To see how far Ellul is from an idealistic interpretation of law, one has only to observe how utterly critical he has become of human law. He says that today law is little more than the expression of the will of the government. He thinks that "normative" law has been lost and he has no hope that it can be recovered. Writing of France he says, "If the facts collide with the laws, we change the laws" (The Political Illusion, p. 74). "The law and the police become identical, for law is no longer anything but an instrument of the state" (The Technological Society, p. 295). The slogan for this modern understanding of law is "Better injustice than disorder" (ibid., p. 295). Efficient order, as determined by the will of the state, becomes the basis of law rather than justice, even relative human justice (ibid., pp. 110, 295-299). He points out that governments abandon law when it is necessary for their survival: "It is a well-established tradition of government to observe the law when nothing is happening; but if something happens, a state of emergency is declared during which special laws will be in force. This happens precisely at the moment when some group tries to use force for its own ends. At that moment the state's reaction is pitiless: it abandons the framework of law and engages in a contest of force with the group in question until it has quelled the rebellious group and made it reenter [sic] the ranks. Put differently, when the state is led by circumstances to employ force, it never observes the law, and we find ourselves in the presence of naked violence. The state is ready, of course, subsequently to legitimize the use of such violence" (The Political Illusion, p. 74). He cites as an example the French practice in Algeria of internment without trial (ibid., p. 75).

Ellul's earlier statements about the law are different from his later social and political cynicism. In his early statements he even went so far/...

> As there is for us no Christian state, because the state has been ordered by God for tasks other than the propagation of faith, likewise law in our understanding cannot have a Christian content. Law, indeed, has been established for all, for those who believe and for those who don't. [1]

In short, there cannot be a Christian law for the secular order.[2] He criticizes the Middle Ages for thinking that Christian law could be applied to the state. Against this he asserts that biblical morality is a consequence of and inseparable from faith in Jesus Christ.[3] He affirms that human law does not have anything to do with the decalogue

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far as to criticize Barth for his failure to realize that law stands over the state and hence the state is not the measure and promulgator of law (Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 122-123). Later he sounds just like the Barth he was then criticizing. He later wrote, "What the state can do, the state will do, and what it does will a priori become just and true. In stating this fact we are not far from the theory stipulating that the law is what the state decides" (The Political Illusion, p. 81; for Ellul's more optimistic earlier view see Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 95-96, 123-131).

William Stringfellow's views on the law are very similar to Ellul's and are decisively influenced by him. Stringfellow not only argues against natural law theories, but also against those who would seek to christianize the law by using grace as a kind of norm for the state. He, in keeping with Ellul, rejects this because he believes that it is based on a misunderstanding of grace. He believes that grace is not a norm of law, but an act and a gift. He claims that only Barth and Ellul (and one might add Stringfellow himself) take seriously this extreme tension between grace and human law (William Stringfellow, "The Christian Lawyer as Churchman," The Vanderbilt Law Review 10 (August 1957), pp. 957-8). Because of this tension between law and grace, Stringfellow concludes that there can be no Christian jurisprudence. The Gospel is seen to stand in judgment over all historic forms of human law, because they are all based on circumstances resulting from the fall. Having said all this, he does not argue that Christians should be indifferent to the law, but he does insist that they should always be looking for opportunities to witness to Christ. The vocational task of the Christian lawyer is to be a Christian in that context, and to break through the order of necessity, in which human law operates, with the proclamation of the Gospel. He argues that only by retaining this tension between grace and human law can the evangelical issue really be posed (ibid., pp. 964-5).

Stringfellow's words are very interesting and he would probably not deny the fact that he has said nothing here which was not previously said by Jacques Ellul.

1. Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 12-13.
2. "Propositions," pp. 40-41.
3. Protestantisme Français, p. 141.

or with the Kingdom of God. He asks Christians how they could expect non-Christians to formulate laws related to the Kingdom of God.[1] He insists that when Christians think of human law they must have existing law in view, not some ideal law derived from their religion.[2]

Ellul explicitly rejects the possibility of founding a juridical system of Christian values. He writes, "Realism leads finally to admitting that it is unthinkable to found a juridical system on Christian love or to translate Christian love into formulas of law."[3] Undoubtedly this rejection is related to his understanding of Christian love as based on a relationship to God. Only if Christian love were some abstract principle could it become the foundation for the secular order. Ellul admits that Christians can apply the law in a loving spirit and for the sake of witnessing to God's love, but he totally denies that secular law can itself be based on Christianity. He says that the regulatory and imperative nature of law contradicts the spontaneous and free nature of Christian love.[4] Since we have already examined Ellul's call for Christian attorneys to serve the poor, we have seen the sense in which non-Christian law can be applied in a Christian manner.

In order to understand Ellul's attitude toward human law, we must be aware of his understanding of the purpose of human law. (The purpose

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1. "Propositions," p. 37.

2. Ibid., p. 35. In a parallel way Ellul argues that Christians should be less concerned about the ideals behind the state's laws and more concerned about the way juridical principles actually work out in practice. He points out that at a theoretical level laws often seem favourable toward justice, but are not so in actual practice (ibid., pp. 41-42).
   What if Christians themselves were to have a hand in establishing the state's laws and principles? Ellul says very little concerning such a situation, perhaps partially because of his utter realism about the secularity of the modern world, perhaps partially because he is very dubious that Christians who embody the kind of perfectionism he suggests will be likely to attain such lofty positions (see below, pp. 174-186).

3. "Propositions," p. 36.

4. Ibid.

of human law is itself understood as consistent with the purpose of the state.)[1] From a strictly human perspective, he believes that the purpose of law is to manufacture, through the use of natural reason, a relative and time-conditioned justice which, when embodied in legal tradition, has the effect of preserving human life. He thinks that man, by the very fact that he exists in society, must establish some form of law for the sake of the common preservation of society.[2] From the Christian perspective, he argues that through the use of secular law God preserves society so that the Church may announce salvation to the world.[3] Just as the meaning in life is to come into fellowship with Jesus Christ, just as God's purpose in creation is covenant fellowship, so secular law, unbeknownst to itself, has its own role to play in the salvation of mankind.[4]

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1. See below, pp. 269-272.

2. Theological Foundation of Law, p. 109; "Droit," p. 274; "Propositions," p. 38. "He must work in order to eat, and he must exercise ... judgment in the process of establishing law in order to prevent the relations with his fellow men from being exclusively violent" (Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 109-110). See Ian T. Ramsey (ed.), Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy, The Library of Philosophy and Theology (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1966), pp. 385-396, for an identical point of view subsumed under the heading of natural law. It is, nevertheless, important to remember that Ellul does reject all theories of natural law which see natural man as aware of God's demands.

3. Theological Foundation of Law, p. 104. He refers to John 19:11 and says that in Jesus' acceptance of the verdict of death he has transformed human law into an instrument for the justification of man and has given the law a purpose and meaning that it does not possess in itself (ibid., pp. 57-58; on p. 58 Ellul refers to Barth's Rechtfertigung und Recht).

4. Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 77-78, 104; "Rappels et Reflexions," p. 138; "Propositions," pp. 38-39. See Barth III/1 for an identical point of view. Creation is seen there as being "the external basis of covenant" and covenant "the internal basis of creation" (III/1, pp. 94ff., 228ff.). Ellul refers to Barth II/2, Chapter 8, and his statement based on Barth's thought helps to summarize both his own and Barth's position. He says that Barth has shown "that the good defended by the state is certainly not the good which the latter could have created or preached of itself, but consists in the fact that the state insures a law and order which permits, makes outwardly possible, the preaching of the knowledge of the good willed by God. This state, in/...

From Ellul's biblical and Barthian definition of the purpose of the state and human law as providing the external framework for the preaching of the Gospel, one very important result is apparent. Both the state and human law are relativized. They are seen as incapable of providing meaning for life or of establishing the values which make life worth living. All that is to be expected from them is the establishment of a relatively fair and stable order, whereby other groups may be free to realize values on their own terms.[1] He insists that legal decadence begins with the absolutizing of the law.[2] He opposes both the omnicompetent modern state and its legal totalitarianism, precisely because he believes that the Gospel and it alone offers true meaning in life.[3] Arguing that law is based on human rules, made by men and applied by men, he affirms that the specifically Christian task with reference to the legal framework is to do battle against legal idolatry.

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in safeguarding the common life of man, in preserving it from dissolution, makes the Christian community possible and consequently the eventual presence among men of the good according to God. It is a matter of a temporary order which does not carry grace within itself but which allows the expression of it" (To Will and To Do, p. 288). See also Barth, Community, State and Church, p. 129; Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Ethics, p. 308) also represents a similar point of view.

1. Ellul tells us that though the law exists for the sake of providing the framework in which the Gospel may be proclaimed, human law does not itself have anything to do directly with salvation. Speaking of human law he says, "It is not normative for the life of the soul and the spirit ... Law, therefore, is of necessity secular ... It is designed only to provide the framework of the spiritual event of God's speaking, and not to translate God's word or to mummify it in legal formulas. This secularism of law implies, however, that the society organized by law must be open. It must be the environment wherein judgment must be passed both materially and spiritually. This is all we can require of law. We cannot ask it to lead to a knowledge of the word, or to set up conditions favorable to its proclamation" (Theological Foundation of Law, p. 105).

2. Ibid., pp. 104-105.

3. "The demonic temptation of law consists of a vision of society without a purpose, or of a purpose other than the judgment of God, realised hic et nunc in the preaching of the gospel. Again we must point out that when law organizes society exclusively for the sake of man's happiness, of production, of power and glory or of riches, and not for the sake of judgment/.....

He believes that Christians must fight against a legal absolutism and authoritarianism, which sets itself up as an ultimate value and denies social diversity and pluralism. He thinks that the Christian jurist must defend "tolerance", thus preventing the divinization of law.[1]

Ellul is even more specific in describing the purpose of the law. He says that law is to insure concrete human rights,[2] that the Gospel may be proclaimed, that men may come to covenant fellowship with God. He points out that men cannot respond to the Gospel unless they have concrete human rights, among which he includes the right to hear the Gospel and the right to embody the Gospel in life. Insofar as the law fails to allow for such human rights, Ellul believes that the law's authority is nullified.[3] He thinks that the human rights which the law must provide for have to do with "concrete freedoms" related to the whole of life and not merely related to man's inner life.[4] He believes that the Church has the right to claim the freedom to embody Christian

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judgment, it ceases to preserve the world. For God preserves the world only for the last judgment" (Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 104-105).

1. "Propositions," p. 37.

2. Ellul points out that through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ for the sin of all men, the human rights of all men have been established (Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 56-57). "From now on man can say that he is not without rights, for he can claim to belong to Jesus Christ. All can make this claim, since Christ died for all ... All are brothers of Christ, receiving in him their rights" (ibid., p. 57). He says that in the covenant realized in Jesus Christ, God recognizes man's rights, because the non-violation of human rights "is the condition God makes for preserving man's life" (ibid., pp. 79-80).
   Ellul insists that the content attributed to human rights has varied from society to society and is "essentially variable and contingent" (ibid., p. 81; see also To Will and To Do, p. 124). He stresses the fact that law is always evolving (Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 75-76).

3. "Should law place man into a situation which makes the proclamation of the covenant futile, it would nullify man's God-given rights, thereby nullifying itself" (ibid., p. 102).

4. Ibid., p. 102.

obedience and not merely the right to verbally proclaim the Gospel.[1] He also insists that the Church must claim the right of legal recognition by the state.[2]

We must be clear at this point that Ellul is not demanding rights for the Church which he is unwilling to grant to other individuals or groups. In his thought the defence of the Church's right to preach the Gospel in word and deed is also a defence of the civil rights of others. He is not arguing for a theocratic society or for a churchly imperialism, but for an "open society" which permits concrete freedoms, one of which is the preaching of the Gospel.[3] He tells us that "Law must allow man to answer in the affirmative the question, 'Do you want to live, and do you want to let live.'"[4] In Ellul's later thought he insists that the state must permit the emergence of autonomous groups, which seek to live in faithfulness to their own values and loyalties.[5]

A real value in Ellul's position is that the dualism he affirms

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1. Theological Foundation of Law, p. 133. "The state becomes an unjust state from the very moment it denies the Church the possibility of proclaiming the gospel. This has often been said. But to proclaim the gospel is not only to proclaim the good news of the forgiveness of sin. It is also to proclaim all the concrete consequences of this good news. It is to announce that Jesus Christ is Lord of creation, with all the implications this entails. Proclamation and faith are therefore not 'private matters'. They are and they must be an action in which man's entire life is involved. When a Church takes a stand on a political question or exercises judgment concerning law, it really preaches the gospel, provided its political position is not the expression of vested interests or moralism" (ibid., p. 132.)
   As Ellul's political cynicism increased, he came to minimize, if not disregard, the importance of churchly stands on political and social questions and became one-sidedly concerned with Christian life witness. See The Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 132-137, for his earlier view and Violence, p. 159, and The Political Illusion, pp. 93-94, for his later position.
2. Theological Foundation of Law, p. 132.
3. Ibid., p. 105.
4. Ibid., p. 103.
5. The Political Illusion, pp. 206ff.; see below, pp. 311-315.

between Christianity and the world enables him to relativize the world and to fight against the idolatry of absolutizing the law, the state, technology, etc. By utterly denying the legitimacy of natural theology, he is able to be a Christocentric warrior against the deification of the secular order, and this itself is an immense social contribution. Oddly enough, it is based precisely on the denial of the possibility of an indirect application of Christianity to the social order!

Though Ellul rejects any application of Christian values to the social order, his relativizing of the state and human law and his defence of the importance of human rights may meet with formal approval by many secular civil libertarians. Thus Christians can join with non-Christians in opposing the omnicompetent state, though non-believers could not possibly accept the Christian's rationale for so doing.

We have now given several examples which seem to bear out our thesis that Ellul does affirm the importance of a uniquely Christian form of social witness, and, while being unwilling to apply Christianity to the social order, does acknowledge that Christians and non-Christians can sometimes agree at the level of concrete activity.[1]

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1. It is true that we have made the suggestions as to specific points at which Christians might be able to join non-Christians. Since Ellul has not given such specific hints, one might be tempted to accuse him of indifference to this area of overlap. Against such a charge, one can answer that what we have done is merely to apply his general recognition that there can be agreement at the level of concrete activity (see above, pp. 36-41). Also, even the hints that we have made are only suggestions as to points where the overlap may occur. Whether it would in fact so occur depends on whether non-believers, pursuing their own motives, would happen to agree at these points. Whether they would or not would surely vary according to time and place.

   Ellul might be accused of indifference toward the area of agreement between Christians and non-Christians because he thinks of Christian law in a decisively subjective context. In the broader perspective of his thought it is doubtful that this charge will hold. It is true that he can write that "Only God can discern what is good in our works. That is not our business and we are not capable of it" (To Will and To Do, p. 75). What is even truer is that he does not deny the validity of a relative casuistry. Though, on his terms, our witness to God's demand/...

demand is not infallible, it is still important and necessary. Once one grants that such a practical casuistry is possible, there is no reason why Christians cannot enquire as to the activities at which they may agree with non-believers -- as long as the relativity of this enquiry is fully recognized.

At one place Ellul seems to have recourse to a doctrine of justification as involving such divine judgment on the world that relative conversation as to the points at which Christians might be able to agree with non-Christians might seem to be invalidated (False Presence, pp. 23-26). When these passages are read in the context of what precedes and follows, it is doubtful whether they really carry this meaning. It seems that the main point that he is trying to make in the chapter in question is that God's judgment always stands over both Christians and non-Christians and since this is the case, modern Christians who endorse the world's morality and projects are making a big mistake. It is doubtful that he is denying that there can be concrete agreement at the level of acts, but is rather insisting that there must not be a systematic endorsement of the ways of the world.

While we are on the subject of Ellul's understanding of God's judgment, it is interesting to note that he does not argue for a kind of evangelical emphasis on the human awareness of sin as the prerequisite for the receipt of grace. Ellul is Barthian here, for he speaks of the "No" as "included in the Gospel". He writes, "One cannot really proclaim the Gospel without also proclaiming the 'No' included in it, and which is also itself a Gospel" (False Presence, p. 25). He rightly insists that the receipt of grace takes the form of judgment as well as assuring man of God's guiding presence and forgiveness. He is particularly insistent upon the importance of the receipt of God's judgment, for he believes that otherwise "the 'Yes' is a nice pleasantry, a comfort which adds to one's material comfort ..." (False Presence, pp. 23-25). He admits that the world wants the Church to proclaim God's "Yes" in isolation from His "No", for that means an endorsement of natural man's existence (False Presence, pp. 25-26). He believes that the Church's true relevance involves a refusal to offer the world what it wants. Instead, the Church must proclaim the truth, which is both judgment and grace.

Ellul seems to be a bit more of an existentialist than the later Barth. While agreeing with Barth that God's judgment is itself an aspect of grace, he also recognizes that man is not likely to be open to grace as long as he is unaware of his insecurity or as long as he is comfortably attached to modern idols (Jonah, p. 58). Ellul thus argues that it is not enough merely to preach the Word. He insists that a part of this preaching includes a critique of the modern idols which prevent man from receiving grace. Thus Ellul's lifelong critique of the commonplaces of the modern world is really an aspect of his evangelical proclamation of the Gospel (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 139-143). In criticizing the commonplaces, he is trying to help clear away obstacles which prevent man from hearing the Gospel. He writes, "If the presence of the true God entails of itself the collapse of the false, the proclamation of the Gospel implies, for the liberation of the person to whom it is proclaimed, the indictment of that which holds him captive" (False Presence, pp. 207-208). He tells us that when the Holy Other confronts human gods, the only possible result is the "annihilation of the gods" (The Politics of God, pp. 150-151). (Barth obviously did not deny this, but he spent most of his time clarifying the nature of the Gospel to be proclaimed, rather than talking about/...

Before concluding this section, we need to recognize that, as is often the case in Ellul's thought, there are some statements which he makes which seem to run counter to the main thrust of his thinking. At these points he seems to envision the possibility of an indirect application of Christian values to the social order. One such example is where he reasons that because Christ died for all men, Christians must defend the worth of every man. While admitting that no social system really protects all men in this way, he affirms that "Christians must ceaselessly renew this requirement".[1] If one is to talk of holding a Christian requirement before society, one is in fact referring to the indirect application of a Christian value to the social order.[2]

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about modern idols ripe for annihilation.) Ellul seeks to relate the Gospel to man in his concrete lostness (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 139-140). He writes, "The cry which God hears comes from the depths of the abyss, from sickness and suffering, from the heart which is humbled, bruised and despairing" (Jonah, p. 56). "Obviously, when man has somewhere to turn he does not pray to God and God does not come to him. As long as man can invent hopes and methods, he naturally suffers from the pretension that he can solve his own problems ... Only when man has lost the vast apparatus of civilization, in personal response, does man remember God" (Jonah, p. 57).

Ellul is not a "correlation" theologian. He is not of the opinion that to expose the human dilemma, itself enables grace to be received. He only insists that this is the context in which the receipt of grace is more likely. The difference between Barth and Ellul seems more one of emphasis and particular vocation than a basic theological difference. (One has only to read Barth's sermons to see that he does preach the Gospel in the context of a frank description of human finitude.)

When it comes to the eschatological understanding of God's judgment, Ellul, like Barth, is willing to hold open the possibility that grace may prove universally triumphant, and the existential dialectic of "Yes" and "No" may give way to an eternal "Yes" (The Politics of God, pp. 20, 53-60; see below, p. 174, n. 2). (Ellul can even speak of the salvation of the animal kingdom — Jonah, p. 95.)

1. "Propositions," p. 41. He also refers to the Christian importance of individual responsibility and then makes a similar social application, opposing the all-powerful state's denial of the same and opposing certain penal practices, whereby the guilty are regarded as merely sick (ibid., p. 42).

2. Of course, if a society already affirms such a value, Christians could appeal to that point of contact. Ellul, however, does not mention that way of going about things in this context.

The clearest example of an indirect application of Christian ethical principles to secular society comes from an early writing, where Ellul applies the Pauline concept of the Body of Christ to the secular working situation. Just as in the Church there are to be different functions but equality among all members, so he reasons that in an enterprise there are different functions, but there must be identical rights for both management and labour. He recognizes that the employer is to govern, but insists that this must be a function based on the ability to do the job and not on privileges of birth or fortune.[1]

There are two places where Ellul implies an indirect application of Christian values to the social order. In an early writing he refers to Switzerland as a "Christian country",[2] and in a very recent writing he refers to Britain as a nation especially influenced by Christianity.[3] It is hard to know what such statements mean if they do not imply the possibility of an indirect moral influence on society stemming from the application of Christian values.

Elsewhere Ellul seems to imply that Christianity can be applied indirectly to the social order. He writes, "The Christian must work, in order that the will of God may be incarnated in actual institutions and organisms."[4] He speaks of plunging into social and political problems in order to have an influence on the world. He says that though the world cannot become a paradise, it can become more tolerable.[5]

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1. "L'Economie: Maitresse ou Servante de l'Homme," pp. 55-56.
2. "Vers un Nouvel Humanisme Politique," p. 12.
3. Violence, p. 15; see also To Will and To Do, pp. 292-293.
4. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 47.
5. Ibid., p. 47. Ellul goes on to speak of this application as involving a concern to open up the social order for Christian proclamation (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 47; see also False Presence, p. 106). Still, he seems here to be arguing for more than the mere relativizing of the social order (though that is included).
   In another early work he wrote, "The Church has left to others the responsibility for revolution. The Church exists in order to insist on/...

It is interesting that even here where Ellul uses language which sounds like the social gospel, he is fundamentally pessimistic where those in the social gospel tradition are optimistic. Having said that the will of God can be incarnated in social institutions, he denies what might seem the obvious conclusion, the possibility of moral progress in history.[1] Even where he uses the language of the indirect application of Christianity to the social order, he annuls his own words by

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on constant change in society and civilization, in order to bring them more into conformity with the order of God. This is a mission of 'permanent revolution'. But the Church has completely lost sight of the fact that an order of God exists, and it has accepted the established order of things. Hence instead of representing values of transformation and judgment (justice, freedom, etc.) founded on Jesus Christ, the Church has merely stood for conservative values, and has left the revolutionary function in the hands of political parties" ("The Situation in Europe," in Man's Disorder and God's Design, Vol. III (1948), pp. 59-60).

1. Ellul denies that the opposition between the world and the Kingdom of God can be diminished (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 47). He totally relativizes any achieved results in society by saying that even if these are accomplished, they are temporary and from the Christian perspective imperfect. He says that such reforms are always infected by sin and thus the Christian must reiterate the claims of God over against the world's disorder (seemingly ignoring his insight that that order might be relatively improved) (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 48).
Just how self-contradictory is an affirmation of the indirect application of Christianity to the social order and the total denial of moral progress can be seen in another formulation from the same work. He writes,"We must give up believing that we can 'improve' the world, that at least we can make man better, even if we cannot make him happy" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 17). He then turns right around and says that we further the disintegrating tendencies of the world when we tell ourselves that nothing can be done to improve the world. He says that to talk like this is to play into the Devil's hands (ibid., p. 17). He then writes, "Thus we seem caught between two necessities, which nothing can alter: on the one hand it is impossible for us to make the world less sinful; on the other hand it is impossible for us to accept it as it is" (ibid., p. 17).
One can hardly help but feel that Ellul here has recourse to dialectics to cover up his own uncertainty as to whether society can or cannot be improved. Why, after all, shouldn't one say that the world can't be improved, if it can't? It is a short step from this fundamentally unsatisfactory formulation to a choice -- either the affirmation that the world can be morally improved or the denial of the same. Ellul's choice came to be the denial of this possibility and the establishment of a basis for the Christian ethic entirely divorced from either the hope of world improvement or the belief in the indirect application of Christianity to the social order.

utterly denying that there can be moral progress. It thus seems fair to say that Ellul's affirmations of the possibility of an indirect application of Christianity to the social order are rare, sometimes hedged with qualifications, and definitely in contradiction to the main line of his thought — which is the affirmation of a radical duality between the Church and the world and the belief in the inapplicability of Christianity to the social order. Perhaps his early statements on the indirect application of Christianity to the social order may be due to the fact that he was struggling to break free from the social gospel tradition. His later statements are probably due more to careless formulation than to any desire to criticize his own emphasis on the duality between the Church and the world.

Freedom from Preoccupation with Results

The issue under consideration in this section relates to what we have been discussing in the last one. The issue of the indirect application of Christianity to society and the hope of world improvement interrelate. A theology which believes in the applicability of Christian values to the social order is also likely to believe in the moral improvability of the world. The denial of the moral improvability of the world seems to eliminate what would naturally be assumed to result from the application of Christian values to the social order. Likewise, a theology which does not believe in the application of Christian values to the social order is free to deny the belief in the moral improvability of the world. If the unique motive and drive for the Christian life has nothing to do with the hope of the moral improvement of the world, the latter can be totally denied without affecting the basis of the Christian life in the slightest.

We have argued in the last section that Ellul generally denies the applicability of Christian values to the social order. It thus comes

as no surprise that he entirely rejects a belief in the moral improvability of the world. In this section we seek to come to an understanding of his rejection of the hope of world improvement and we hope to see how his understanding of the Christian life comes to expression in this rejection.

We begin our discussion at a very unlikely place — Albert Schweitzer's description of Paul's understanding of ethical motivation. Schweitzer pointed out that Paul had no hope that the natural world could develop into the Kingdom of God. Schweitzer nevertheless argued that Paul expected the redeemed to manifest the Spirit of God's Kingdom which was in them:[1]

> Purely from inner necessity, not with a view to success, there arises an activity which is determined by the Kingdom of God. As a star, by the inner law of the light which is in it, shines over a dark world, even when there is no prospect of heralding a morning which is to dawn upon it, so the Elect must radiate the light of the Kingdom in the world.[2]

Schweitzer's description of Paul's position is also an accurate description of Ellul's.[3] Just as New Testament Christians felt called to love their neighbours, though they expected history to end in catastrophe and though they did not believe in the continual growth of moral goodness in history — so Ellul articulates a Christian ethic, while totally denying a belief in moral progress in history. For him the moral impetus for the Christian life comes entirely from the "realized" presence of the Kingdom in believers, the hope of the future Kingdom beyond history, and the belief that truly Christian conduct can be instrumental in leading others to faith in Christ.

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1. Albert Schweitzer, The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle (1931), p. 388.
2. Ibid., pp. 388-389.
3. Ellul writes, "If we act, it is because God has loved us, because we have been saved, because God's spirit dwells in us, because we have received revelation, and not in order ... that society may become Christian or happy or just or affluent, or that we may overcome hunger or be good politicians" (The Politics of God, p. 198).

Ellul explicitly rejects world improvement as the goal of the Christian life.[1] He says that the purpose of the Christian life is not the reformation of society, nor the increase of justice, but witnessing that others may be converted to Christ.[2] To accomplish the Christian goal of witnessing, he believes that what is important is the consistency between the Christian's life witness and the Gospel proclaimed — not the improvement of the world. He tells us:-

> We have not to strive and struggle in order that righteousness may reign upon the earth. We have to be "just" or "righteous" ourselves, bearers of righteousness ... Likewise we have not to force ourselves, with great effort and intelligence to bring peace upon the earth — we have ourselves to <u>be</u> peaceful, for where there are peacemakers, peace reigns.[3]

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1. <u>Presence of the Kingdom</u>, pp. 17, 47, 80. Bonhoeffer likewise argued that the Christian goal is to conform to Christ and to witness to Him — not to improve the world by means of programmes and plans: "What is of ultimate importance is now no longer that I should become good, or that the condition of the world should be made better by my action, but that the reality of God should show itself everywhere to be the ultimate reality" (Bonhoeffer, <u>Ethics</u>, p. 55; see also pp. 17-23). The difference between Bonhoeffer and Ellul at this point is that Ellul relates the insight about the purpose of the Christian life to a perfectionism, whereas Bonhoeffer in his later thought (in contrast to <u>The Cost of Discipleship</u>) not only did not draw this conclusion, but stressed the importance of ethical compromise.

2. <u>Violence</u>, pp. 148-149.

3. "The whole object of ethics is not to attain an end (and we know very well that for a genuine Christian ethic there is no such thing as a striving for holiness), but to manifest the gift which has been given us, the gift of grace and of peace, of love and of the Holy Spirit, that is, the very end pursued by God and miraculously present within us. Henceforth our human idea of means is absolutely overturned; its root of pride and of power has been cut away. The means is /<u>sic</u>/ no longer called to 'achieve' anything. It is delivered from its uncertainty about the way to follow, and the success to be expected" (<u>Presence of the Kingdom</u>, p. 82).

   Ellul is at one with Barth in emphasizing a "causal ethic", an ethic of grateful response. It is apparently this point which he underlines when he seems to reject a striving for holiness. He surely is not denying the importance of a Christian sharing in God's holiness. That would be to deny his whole covenant ethic. Nor is he ruling out the importance of a Christian life-style which seeks to be faithfully obedient to God. This would be to deny his perfectionism. He is saying that the Christian life is the expression of the gift of God's own presence and not a feeble effort to procure salvation through our own works. He understands the Christian life in the context of grace received rather than in the context of grace sought through works.

The reason why Ellul rejects world improvement as the goal of the Christian life has to do with his belief that the sole purpose of the Christian life is to witness to Christ and to do so with methods consistent with Christ's demands. He writes:-

> The Holy Spirit will give true power and efficacy only to means which are in exact agreement with the actual content of the gospel. There must be intercommunication of means and end if the Holy Spirit is to use our means and invest them with his power.[1]

He argues that just as Israel did not seek to conform to the world or to gain worldly approval, so the Christian goal is to represent the incarnate presence of the Wholly Other. The mark of the Church is to be her "inassimilability", her faithfulness in witnessing to the transcendent God, not her success in improving the world.[2] He reasons that just as God loved us freely as the expression of His own love, so Christian conduct becomes a parable of God's love to the extent that Christians are "released from worry about usefulness or efficacy [my underlines]".[3] In

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1. The Politics of God, p. 136. Ellul argues that the Gospel cannot be spread by the use of violence or propaganda. He says that if these means are employed, whatever "success" there may be is not truly that of the Gospel. He recognizes that God's hidden sovereignty is not restricted to acting through pure Christian means. However, he believes that impure means do not witness to God's intentional will, and hence Christians must seek to be faithful at the level of means (The Politics of God, pp. 136-137).

2. Ibid., pp. 141-142. "To be controlled by utility and the pursuit of efficacy is to be subject to the strictest determination of the actual world. To want to attain results is necessarily not to be a witness to the free gift of God" (ibid., p. 197; see also p. 134). "We are driven by the utility of the world and the importance of results. What counts is what may be seen, achieved, victory, whether it be over hunger or a political foe or what have you. What matters is that it may be useful. My desire in these meditations on the Second Book of Kings is to call our judgments into question" (ibid., p. 197). "To do a gratuitous, ineffective, and useless act is the first sign of our freedom and perhaps the last. The men of the Second Book of Kings, each in his own place, played their part for God. But none of them was indispensable. None of them served in a decisive way the great plan of the Father accomplished in the Son ... None of them did the radical deed, and each of them was free in his own way" (ibid., p. 198).

3. Ibid., p. 198.

his understanding, the Christian's obedient witness to the transcendent God has the effect of interjecting true freedom into history. Ellul believes that this interjection of freedom would not be possible were the goal of life the improvement of the world, or the attainment of results, rather than the manifestation of Christian reality.[1]

Closely related to Ellul's rejection of world improvement as the goal of Christian life is his understanding of Christian "efficiency". (He rather loves to take conventional words and give them radically new Christian meanings.) He says that Christian efficiency is entirely a function of man's relationship with God. He believes that according to the Bible, efficiency has to do with man's will being brought into conformity with God's intention.[2] He insists that such personal union with God "implies an intervention in the historical nexus",[3] and thus is not merely an inner feeling. For Ellul, such Christian efficiency involves the effort to be faithful to God at the level of means, and the willingness to trust the results into God's keeping. He believes that if Christians seek to be faithful in this way, God can bring "results", but results which are hidden from general view.[4] (Christ on

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1. "If we do not pray, if we do not do the works of faith, if we do not seek after wisdom, if we do not preach the gospel, nothing in history, nor very probably in the church, would look much different ... And yet there would be lacking something irreplaceable and incommensurable, something that is measured neither by institutions nor metaphysics nor products nor results, something that modifies everything qualitatively and nothing quantitatively, something that gives the only possible meaning to human life ... This is freedom: man's freedom within God's freedom; ... Man's freedom which is free obedience to God and which finds unique expression in childlike acts, in prayer and witness ..." (The Politics of God, pp. 198-199).

2. Ibid., p. 138. Ellul affirms that human means are meaningless unless man is led by the Holy Spirit (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 86, 88, 95). "No purely human activity — all this work of man, which today fills the field of our vision — is really a 'means' at all" (ibid., p. 88).

3. The Politics of God, p. 138.

4. Ibid., pp. 137-139. "As regards effects and results, then, each must rest content with the Lord's promise. Results are promised if we/ ...

the Cross is the model for a Christian efficiency which appears to the world as the exact opposite.[1] He is not encouraging a Christian defeatism, for he believes that God can accomplish His purposes through Christian witness; all he denies is that this "success" is of the nature of tangible proof,[2] or that it is the same as worldly success.

Ellul argues that "because we cannot ascertain any evident or visible results, we may not stop and rest".[3] He encourages a Christian "activism" precisely on the basis of the belief that man can never rest content with apparent results, but must be ever striving to be faithful at the level of means, that God in His own mysterious providence may use our witness as He sees fit. He also stresses the corporate context in which Christian obedience occurs. Each Christian must contribute at his own level, that his action may be woven by God into the larger context of the action provided by other Christians.[4]

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we keep to our own level and use the appropriate means" (The Politics of God, p. 139). "If Christian action is effective, the effects or fruits are gathered by God and collected by him alone. ... This efficacy will never be evident to the world" (ibid., pp. 139-140).

1. Bonhoeffer writes, "The figure of the Crucified invalidates all thought which takes success for its standard" (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 15).

2. The Politics of God, p. 139.

3. Ibid.

4. "If the efficacy of the man of God comes to a halt, all is lost. Jeroboam ruined the kingdom of David. If Apollos had not watered, what Paul had planted would never have grown. Every Christian, then, is strictly accountable, just as there must be continuity in prayer and continuity in effective action. When a Christian quits, he annuls thereby all that preceding Christians have been able to do. Efficiency is written in the history of the church as well as the world. It implies that everyone play his part in the life of the church and be prepared to carry on whether or not there is any tangible proof of results" (The Politics of God, p. 139; see I Cor. 3:5-9).

In the light of such statements as this one, I regard Stephen Rose's description of Ellul's position as representing "radical individualism" to be very misleading (Rose et al., Katallagete, p. 44). Ellul denies having any interest in stressing the individual in a romantic sense. He recognizes that individuals can be understood only in relationship to society, but he also insists that society is made up of individuals. He/...

It is interesting how consistent Ellul's emphasis on God's initiative is with his perfectionism. Because God is seen to be the only One responsible for consequences, Christians can be entirely preoccupied with concern about the faithfulness of the means used.[1] Ellul, for example, applies this very reasoning to the issue of violence, arguing that Christians need not resort to violence to procure results. Why? Because God alone is in charge of results.[2]

He regards the debate about the priority of the individual vs. the priority of society to be entirely artificial. The truth of the matter is that Ellul has no confidence in either sinful individuals or in sinful societies. His confidence is in Jesus Christ! ("Un Nouvel Humanisme Politique," pp. 15-16). He writes, "A Christian ought to know how little interest attaches to him as a person. And he ought to know that it is better to talk about Jesus Christ than about himself" ("Mirror," p. 200).

Of course Ellul's emphasis on God carries with it the recognition of the importance of individual obedience to God, but this is a stress on the importance of God's command, not an emphasis on the individual as such. It is certainly true, in his understanding, that the Word of God is seen as being addressed to individuals and as leading to freedom from bondage to the crowd. However, this stress is not really an individualism, since he sees individual Christians as members of the Church (Jonah, p. 22) and as involved in a continuity of interaction with fellow-Christians and with Christians throughout the ages (The Politics of God, pp. 138-139). He recognizes that no individual's action is indispensable, but merely one small part in God's vast design (ibid., p. 198).

It is true that Ellul argues that prayer is not "primarily communal" and says this by pointing out that Jesus is said to have sought to withdraw from the crowd and even from his disciples in order to be alone in prayer. He, however, is not denying that communal prayer is also important (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 118).

It seems that there is only one sense in which Ellul can justly be accused of being an individualist, and that has to do with the fact that some of his words about Christian social witness seem to invalidate the importance of Christian participation in programmes and institutions (see below, pp. 207-8). If this criticism is what Rose had in mind, he might have been able to make his statement in a more careful way, rather than seeing Ellul's and Barth's (!) position summarized in the folk tune:

"You've got to cross that lonesome valley,
You've got to cross it by yourself."

(Rose et al., Katallagete, p. 44). This is not the only point where Rose's journalistic style leads him to express inaccurate statements (see above, p. vi (et seq.), n. 2, for an appraisal of his statement that Ellul has little concern for the organized Church, a charge which, of course, relates to this accusation that he is an individualist).

1. The Politics of God, p. 134.

2. Violence, p. 171. "The prophets speak against the rich, but they never/ ...

Ellul's words about Christian efficiency show that the goal of the Christian life is not the attainment of results obvious to the world. Thus his reasoning about efficiency supports his non-belief that the purpose of Christian life is visible world improvement.

Not only does Ellul reject world improvement as the goal of the Christian life, he also explicitly rejects the doctrine of general moral progress in history.[1] His non-belief in moral progress in history is based on his biblical view that man is radically sinful and that the immoral results of sin are so immense as to rule out any speculation about moral progress in history: "The Bible expressly tells us that the history of mankind ends in judgment. It does not give place to the Kingdom."[2] His rejection of moral progress in history is consistent with his apocalyptic thought,[3] which affirms that history is marked by the presence of various immoral signs, which are the effect of man's rebellion against God. In the background of his rejection of moral progress in history is also his knowledge that God's incarnate love was not received by the world.[4] His reasoning seems to be that it is irrational to believe in the moral improvability of the world, since the

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never incite the poor to take justice into their own hands, to use violence. The prophets always promise God's judgment on the rich, they speak the word against the rich, but at the same time they declare that justice is the Lord's and that trust must be placed in him" (Violence, p. 161).

1. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 48, 86.

2. False Presence, p. 20. "We must ... maintain the dialectic of the 'No' and the 'Yes', which allows of no speculation about progress, or about history, or about successful participation in the political works of man today" (ibid., p. 24). He says that the belief in progress is inconsistent with the belief that the Kingdom of God comes at the end of time, not as the gradual ascent of humanity toward God (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 86; see also pp. 17, 47-48. For related material see our discussion on pp. 158-159 above).

3. See below, pp. 241-249.

4. Meaning of the City, p. 37.

world then and now rejects its Saviour and thus the basis for true moral renewal.[1] Though his rejection of the doctrine of moral progress in history is biblically based, he also appeals to his own observations. He writes, "I refuse to believe in the 'progress' of humanity, when I see from year to year the lowering of standards among men I know, whose lives I follow, in the midst of whom I live ..."[2]

We said that Ellul rejects any philosophy of moral progress in history. He even disagrees with Reinhold Niebuhr's modest affirmation of the possibility of a general growth in good in history, which is itself offset by a continual growth of evil. All Ellul will admit is that in each generation there may be moral gains at particular points, which are offset by losses at other points. His position is different from Niebuhr's in that he resolutely refuses to believe in any general growth of good in history.[3] All he is prepared to admit is that at the level of particular action (for example, the abolition of slavery), there can be a moral gain. Beyond this he is not willing to speculate, on the grounds that to do so is inconsistent with a realistic doctrine of man.[4]

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1. Along similar lines he writes, "The world in fact cannot be reformed: the Church does not have to propose an ideal, requirement or program to it, because the world is incapable of responding as long as it is not reconciled with God" ("Note Problématique sur l'Histoire de l'Eglise," p. 313).

2. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 119-120.

3. "Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien," pp. 170-171.

4. Ellul says that he disagrees with Reinhold Niebuhr's view that there can be "social ethical progress". He argues that such an admission is inconsistent with an insistence on the radical fallenness of man (To Will and To Do, p. 289).
   Niebuhr in his later thought came to believe that there can be moral progress within history (thus he acknowledged his debt to the Renaissance tradition). He insisted, however, that there is also immorality in history and that this wickedness also continues to grow (Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Part 2, pp. 85ff., 123ff., 155; see also N.H.G. Robinson, Christ and Conscience, pp. 116ff.). "The total historical enterprise is not progressively emancipated from evil. The / ...

Even from a purely human perspective there is much to be said in favour of rejecting the doctrine of general moral progress in history. An impossible moral calculus would be required to rate various moral values and then to evaluate various civilizations throughout history. If no such calculus is possible and if no such application could possibly be made, if a progressive world view cannot be based on empirical evidence — it is puzzling that such a doctrine should be accepted, especially by Christians who hold a very realistic doctrine of man.

Perhaps the real basis for such a progressive ideology is often, as Ellul suggests, the confusion between material progress and moral progress, as though the latter were simply a function of the former and followed inevitably on the heels of material improvement.[1] The belief in moral progress may really be a belief and not a generalization from evidence, a belief invented by modern men who value material progress and who want to think that spiritual and moral progress will follow suit. Ellul believes, quite to the contrary, that affluence dulls moral sensitiveness, though he is not prepared to argue that total poverty necessarily

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The Christian faith expects some of the most explicit forms of evil at the end of history" (Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 136). "Jesus anticipates the growth of evil as well as the growth of good in history. Among the signs of the end will be 'wars and rumours of wars' and the appearance of false Christs. (Mt. 24:6)" (Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Part 2, p. 49). Niebuhr was thus concerned about the indeterminate possibilities of development within history, while being critical of pretentious claims of final fulfilment in history (ibid., pp. 207ff.).

It is interesting that Niebuhr is a bit confused as to whether he does or does not have biblical support for his view of history. He appeals explicitly to the Renaissance tradition, rather than to the Bible, for his idea about the possibility of moral progress in history. Yet he turns around and says that Jesus anticipated a "growth of good in history". Where is the evidence that Jesus speculated on anything as vague as this? (That He did so is especially problematic in the light of His apparent belief in the consummation of history in the near future.) A growth in Christian faithfulness would, of course, be another matter — for that does not have to do with "good" in general history, but obedience in the Christian life.

1. A Critique, pp. 179-195.

increases such sensitivities.[1]

Ellul's eschatological understanding of the motivation for the Christian life (which involves his rejection of the belief in moral progress) relates to his affirmation of a ruthlessly pessimistic sociological understanding of the modern world. Though a degree of sociological pessimism is certainly an implication of the non-belief in general moral progress, one suspects that the radical pessimism of his sociology is not necessitated by his theology. Without affirming the general moral perfectibility of the world, one could still give more recognition than he does to the fact that man can improve his external living situation and that such improvement is not without significance. At places he does recognize that there can be an improvement in man's external situation,[2] but in his three main sociological works he evidences a radical pessimism about the social improvability of the world, a pessimism not necessitated by the denial of the general moral improvability of the world. In his three main sociological works he also seems to deny his stated belief that Christians, by expressing their faith, might be capable of particular institutional reform (for example, the abolition of slavery).[3] Undoubtedly many readers will feel that Ellul's

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1. See below, pp. 324-326.

2. Ellul speaks of the possibility of technical progress in the sense of progress in "the amelioration of man's condition or situation" (The Politics of God, p. 183). Though he does not believe that history as such is progressive even in this sense, he does here seem to admit that a modest improvement in the social order is at least possible. Here Ellul argues that such technical progress is not necessarily good, but he does not affirm that it is necessarily bad (ibid., p. 183).

   We can agree that recent technical progress does not prove that history as such is progressive in even this sense. (A nuclear war could change the whole direction of technical development, as could a scarcity of natural resources.) We can also agree that technical progress is not necessarily good. (For example, many ecologists are wondering if our over-production and consumption may not be leading succeeding generations to material regress.)

3. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 84-85.

attitude toward the technological society and the city is at least partially the expression of his own bias, rather than the result of objective analysis.[1] Many, including this reader, will prefer those few sociological statements where he recognizes the ambiguity of technological phenomena and the possibility of social improvement. To some it will seem an obvious fact that there can be social improvements (not that there always are). Most important of all, we must vigorously insist that Ellul's sociology must be evaluated on its own merit. Whether the utter bleakness of his sociology is true or false, it is nevertheless the case that the Christian belief in sin does not imply the world's total incapacity for social and institutional improvement. Also, many, including myself, will want to hold Ellul to his theological word, that there can be particular moral results stemming from the application of the Christian faith. (We are not disagreeing with his denial of general moral progress.) It seems a demonstrable fact that at particular points there can be moral improvement in the social order.

We must now give a short exposition of Ellul's characteristically pessimistic sociology, which seems to evidence an utter hopelessness about the social improvability of the modern world. Though he occasionally gives more careful statements, his general social view is that the technological society and the modern city are thoroughly bad.[2] He generally offers no hope that the technological society can be socially improved.[3] Likewise, he sees the city as the centre of the modern world

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1. See above, pp. 22-26.

2. See above, pp. 22-24.

3. Of the technological society he writes, "It is useless to hope for the modification of a system like this — so complex and precisely adjusted that no single part can be modified by itself. Moreover, the system perfects and completes itself unremittingly. And, except in print, I see no sign of any modification of the technical edifice, no principle of a different social organization that would not be founded on technical necessity" (The Technological Society, p. 116; see also pp. 428, 433-434; A Critique, p. 232).

and has no hope that it can be even socially or institutionally improved, or morally improved at particular points.[1] He calls Christians to evangelical mission in the city, but utterly denies that Christian witness can change the city in the least. The meaning of the city is seen to have absolutely nothing to do with the hope of its social improvement, but is seen to have to do entirely with the alien presence of Christian missionaries.[2]

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1. "Let us harbor no illusions. No man will change the city — first of all, because he will never use it for good" (Meaning of the City, p. 168; see also p. 57). "Man is not to be counted on to transform the problem of the city. He is no more capable of transforming the environment chosen for him and built for him by the Devil, than he is of changing his own nature" (ibid., p. 170; see also p. 169).

2. Ibid., pp. 76, 181. In the light of Ellul's nearly nihilistic sociology, the reader can hardly cease to be amused that he occasionally makes statements which envision the possibility of a fundamental moral transformation of the social order. He is not here referring to a gradual moral improvement, but a kind of societal leap to a higher level. Though he is not here affirming a gradual moral improvement of the social order, what he says cannot be harmonized with his denial of moral progress in history and it certainly is inconsistent with his utter hopelessness about the social improvability of the technological society. These statements which affirm the possibility of a fundamental transformation of society are rare and are thus on the periphery of his thought — nevertheless, they are present and present even in his sociological writings.

   When Ellul speaks of this possibility of a fundamental transformation of civilization, he is not thinking of the Christian conversion of the world, but of a miraculous social conversion as an indirect result of Christian influence. He speaks of the possibility of the "birth of a new civilization" originating in God's will (Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 35-36). He refers to the possibility of fundamentally altering the framework of civilization (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 34, 44). "We are confronted by a choice: either, a mass civilization, technological, 'conformist' — the 'Brave New World' of Huxley — Hell organized upon earth for the bodily comfort of everybody — or, a different civilization, which we cannot yet describe because we do not know what it will be; it still has to be created, consciously by men" (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 41-42). "Concretely, we see that unless the world can re-discover, by a spiritual revolution, an end which is both transcendent and present, an end whose presence can be perceived even in the secret world of technique, it is lost" (ibid., p. 89; see also p. 139). Even in a very recent article he writes that "we must work on earth ... to bring in a new civilization that cannot yet be imagined" ("Between Chaos and Paralysis," p. 750).

   Of course, Ellul speaks of the transformation of civilization as only a possibility, but it is surely a strange possibility to be held by the same man who is so utterly hopeless at other places (even in the same books / ...

We have already recognized that Ellul's rejection of world improvement as the goal of the Christian life has the effect of encouraging a Christian perfectionism. We now need to enquire as to additional ethical implications which stem from his position. While not agreeing with the accuracy of his nearly nihilistic sociology, we can still see that he is of pastoral help to the cynics (of whom he is one). He is saying, in effect, that Christ can be the Lord even of those whose analysis of the modern world leads them to the brink of nihilism. By separating the motivation and basis of the moral life from the hope of world improvement, he gives ethical encouragement to those who see the world as very harsh and tragic. Ellul affirms that one can be absolutely honest sociologically, and the pessimistic results should not in the least affect the basis of the Christian call to love.

It is important to note that Ellul's rejection of world improvement as the goal of the Christian life, his denial of general moral progress, and his single-minded evangelical definition of the purpose of

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books!) about the possibility of changing the technological society. Strangely enough, sometimes even when he speaks of the utterly hopeless bondage of the modern state (The Political Illusion, p. 80), he paradoxically (or contradictorily!) holds open this possibility that if Christians and others offered radical resistance to the state (not violent, but the embodiment of autonomous values and the establishment of autonomous groups), the nature of the state might be transformed (The Political Illusion, p. 223). (This thought does not seem very consistent with his apocalyptic thinking, which sees certain inevitable evils as the necessary characteristics of this final age.) One wonders how seriously he takes such a possibility, since his statements to this effect seem smothered by massive sociological pessimism. For example, he argues that democracies must of necessity resort to the use of propaganda, which he regards as an inherently totalitarian method (The Technological Society, pp. 285, 288-9; Propaganda, pp. 126, 134, 138, 250). Even without the sociological nihilism, the proposals seem a bit naive and even utopian coming from such a Calvinist theologian as Jacques Ellul. He must realize their naiveté, for sometimes even in the same breath in which he utters such possibilities he seems to deny them. He says, "Finally, when communities with a 'style of life' of this kind have been established, possibly the first signs of a new civilization may begin to appear. At the present time, however, we are in no position to reflect on such possibilities, nor to be attracted by such prospects!" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 60).

the Christian life — are not intended to encourage a defeatist attitude with reference to Christian works. By brushing aside false hopes, he helps to give courage to Christians living in very discouraging times. In a very interesting critique of a modern commonplace, he calls men to assume their modest roles as helpers. He criticizes the all-or-nothing approach to life, whereby people become discouraged because they cannot seem to perfect the world. His point is that we have no right to give up moral effort, using the imperfectibility of the world as an excuse. Rather, in gratitude to God, we are called to witness to Christ in our lives, even though the visible results of our good deeds may seem meagre. The moral task of the Christian life continues no matter how difficult may be the world situation in which we live, because the moral task is based on Christ's presence and command and not on the hope of world improvement. A Christian ethic decisively based on the hope of historical progress is liable to have its very motivation destroyed when events prove the direction of history to be more tragic than hopeful. The most solidly based Christian motivation is precisely the Christ-centred one: "We love because he first loved us" (I Jn. 4:19).

One of the most important ethical consequences of Ellul's rejection of general moral progress in history is that it encourages a critical stance with reference to <u>any</u> society in which Christians might live. In his view, Christians are never to be satisfied with any achieved state of affairs. It is interesting that even with Reinhold Niebuhr's modest affirmation of the possibility of growth in history (offset by a growth of evil), his thought came to be the basis of an American pragmatism, which was extremely supportive of American foreign policy and certainly not radically discontented with American society generally. With Ellul's utter rejection of any general doctrine of moral progress in history, the Christian always finds himself in the position of having to be critical

of any achieved state of affairs — because he is to represent the transcendent Kingdom in a world which continually rejects that Kingdom.[1]

Christian Humility

In discussing Ellul's understanding of Christian humility, we are still dealing with material related to the general topic of Christian witness. What he says on this issue, as well as what he says on Christian suffering and love, help to indicate his understanding of the general shape of the Christian life, which he believes is faithful to Christ and able to witness to Him.

As always seems to be the case, Ellul's normative position on Christian humility is based on his biblical understanding. He appeals to Luke 14:7-11, to make his point that Christians are not to put themselves in first place: "Every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will by exalted" (Lk. 14:11).[2] Ellul also

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1. "Even when the institutions, the laws, the reforms which he has advocated have been achieved ... he still has to be in opposition, he still must exact more, for the claim of God is as infinite as His forgiveness. Thus the Christian is called to question unceasingly all that man calls progress, discovery, facts, established results, reality, etc. He can never be satisfied with all this ..." (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 48). "In reality all solutions, all economic, political, and other achievements are temporary. At no moment can the Christian believe either in their perfection or in their permanence. They are always vitiated by the sin which infects them, by the setting in which they take place. Thus the Christian is constantly obliged to reintegrate the claims of God to re-establish this God-willed 'order' in the presence of an order which constantly tends towards disorder" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 48).

2. It is interesting that Ellul refers to a humiliation in eternity which corresponds to one's efforts at self-exaltation in life, but because of his Barthian openness to the possibility of universal salvation, he states this in a way which does not imply eternal destruction. He writes, "We must learn (or relearn ceaselessly) that to an elevation realized in our life and in the world corresponds (because God has decided thus, and not because of any immanent justice) our abasement in the Kingdom. We do not say our exclusion from the Kingdom. It is not a question of salvation ... It is a question of the place that God attributes to us in the Kingdom" ("L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 31; see above, p. 156 fn).

appeals to Luke 22:24-27 as the basis of his position. Though national leaders are self-assertive and tyrannize others, Christians are to act in the opposite way. Instead of the self-assertive possession of power and status, Christian greatness has to do with humble service.[1] In addition he refers to I Cor. 13:5, the belief that love does not insist on its own way. He even sets his argument for Christian self-effacement and humble service in Christological perspective by appealing to Phil. 2:4, which encourages a Christian humility based on an imitation of the humiliation seen when the Son became man.[2] That the humiliated Son was exalted shows that Christian greatness equals humility.[3]

Ellul is very perceptive in his exposition of these texts. He points out that one is not called simply to refrain from taking first place when one does not merit it. The prohibition is against claiming first place even if one merits it. He also notices that the texts do not refer simply to an inner attitude, opposing the desire for exaltation. Rather, they call Christians to both an inner and an outer humility.[4]

With Ellul's insistence that humility has an outer as well as an inner aspect, we are at the very centre of his position.[5] He is

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1. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," pp. 30-31.

2. Ibid., p. 32.

3. "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself /my underline/ and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name ..." (Phil. 2:4-9).

4. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," pp. 30-31. "These decisions ... which must be interior, cannot remain only interior, they must be expressed by conduct ..." (ibid., p. 30).

5. "The law of Christ is the law of humility. This humility is not only/...

expressing a theme dear to his heart, the Barthian insistence that Christ claims both the inner and the outer allegiance of man. Just as we had no reason to fault Ellul and Barth for their "One Kingdom" reasoning,[1] so we can agree that a humility which has to do only with an inner attitude is really a form of hypocrisy. If Christians are not to exalt themselves, this must result in outward conduct faithful to this belief.

Ellul's position on Christian humility is dependent on other aspects of biblical tradition. It is related to the belief in the sovereign God who alone is in charge of results. The Christian can make no boast on the behalf of his works, because the results of Christian action are not in Christian hands, but in God's.[2]

Also related to Ellul's view of Christian humility is his belief that the true results of the Christian life are visible only to God. In his opinion, part of the Christian confession of sin involves pronouncing the verdict of "inutility" on one's own's works. The main textual basis for his conviction is Luke 17:10, "So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty."[3] Though the Christian is to relativize his own works by refusing to make claims as to their ultimate

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only interior. The whole Gospel is there in order to remind us that we cannot believe in the humility of riches, of kings, of powers; for humility first of all is marked by the abandoning of riches and of power. All the rest is hypocrisy" ("L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 31).

1. See above, pp. 88-90.

2. The Politics of God, p. 139.

3. Ibid., p. 196. "If we are ready to be unworthy or unprofitable servants (although busy and active at the same time), then our works can truly redound to the glory of him who freely loved us first" (ibid., p. 197). "If we come before God decked out in the glory of these lofty, grandiose, and successful works then ... 'Woe to you that are rich' (Luke 6:24), for the rich man today is the successful man" (ibid., p. 196).

worth, by refusing a self-congratulatory attitude, Ellul believes that God is free to pass a different verdict (Mtt. 25:21).[1] He is here really only applying his doctrine of justification by faith, insisting that true success is neither success as others see us or as we see ourselves — but only as God sees us. The affirmation that God alone truly understands what is and is not "successful" conduct, enables the Christian to have an attitude of humility with reference to the results of his own life.

Ellul's biblical exposition at this point is well founded and is capable of wide New Testament support. In support of his conclusion derived from Lk. 14:7-11, we note that John Fenton argues that many of Jesus' teachings stress the idea of smallness before God.[2] Fenton contends, for example, that the reason why it is difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God (Mk. 10:25) is because their power gets in the way of the necessary recognition of their human powerlessness before God.[3] In this context, he refers to the fact that the theme of the first becoming last and the last first is a common one in Jesus' teaching (Mk. 10:31; Mtt. 19:30; 20:16; Lk. 13:30).[4] In the same connection, Fenton refers to the passage cited by Ellul (Lk. 14:7ff.) and argues that

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1. The Politics of God, p. 196.

2. Wolfgang Trilling refers to Mtt. 23:12 (a parallel to Luke 14:11, cited by Ellul), and argues that the meaning is that "Rank is assessed according to the law which says that the great is small and the small great" (Wolfgang Trilling, The Gospel According to St. Matthew, New Testament for Spiritual Reading, Vol. II (1969), pp. 84-85; see also pp. 172-3).

3. John Fenton, What Was Jesus' Message? (1971), p. 23; see also Rev. 3:15-19.

4. Commenting on the Matthean Beatitudes (Mtt. 5:3-11), Fenton writes, "These sayings declare who is to enter the kingdom which is coming. God will then reverse the positions and judgments which men have made for themselves in this world, and the last will be first, and the first last (20:16); so it is those who are least like kings and rulers -- the least prosperous — who are the blessed. There is thus, running through these sayings, a contrast between present appearances and the future reality" (J.C.Fenton, Saint Matthew (1963), pp. 79-80).

it means precisely that the disciple is to choose a place of lowliness now, that at the final judgment he may be approved by God. Similarly, he refers to Jesus' teaching concerning children (Mk. 10:14ff.) and says that the point is that the child is a model for the disciple, because in Jesus' day children had no status. Again, the point is the smallness and powerlessness of Christian disciples.[1] His conclusion is that "Part of what Jesus meant by repentance is this: God is going to rule, so you had better abdicate. Turn from your usual course into the opposite direction. Your usual course is self-aggrandisement: the opposite direction is self-abnegation."[2] Fenton argues that this aspect of repentance is stated most fully when Jesus tells His disciples that they must deny themselves and lose their lives.[3]

Exegetical support can also be given for Ellul's conclusions derived from his analysis of Lk. 22:24-27. Wolfgang Trilling, commenting on Mtt. 20:25-7 (the Matthean parallel) argues that a most striking contrast is drawn between a despotic human ruler and a willing slave.[4] He writes:-

> Worldly rule is exercised through oppression ... In sharp contrast to all this, Jesus tells his disciples: 'It shall not be so among you.' Those who desire to have power must renounce all

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1. John Fenton, What Was Jesus' Message?, pp. 23-25, and Saint Matthew, p. 291. In Mtt. 18:1-4 we read: "At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, 'Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?' And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them, and said, 'Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.'" Fenton commenting on this verse says, "The disciples ask, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? and Jesus tells them that they will never even enter the kingdom unless they give up all desire for being great, and become like children, without any status or privileges. Those who do that will be great in the kingdom" (J.C. Fenton, Saint Matthew, p. 290).
2. John Fenton, What Was Jesus' Message?, p. 25.
3. Ibid., p. 26; see Mark 8:34ff., Lk. 14:25ff.
4. Wolfgang Trilling, Matthew, Vol. II, p. 129.

> power; those who wish to be great must be small; those who wish to have the first place must take the last. The new spirit is the spirit of service. The new law is the law of self-abandonment for others ... Man's natural feelings rise up in revolt, which only shows how far he is from having found himself and his true vocation as man. For he who loses his life will find it /Mtt./ (16:25).[1]

Fenton's appraisal of the same passage is identical.[2]

Returning to Ellul's own analysis, I think we would misunderstand his intention if we were to interpret his words in a legalistic sense. He offers general words, which do not themselves determine what in individual cases would or would not constitute self-exaltation. Though he believes that self-exaltation is to be avoided, though the Christian way of life is seen to involve inner and outer renunciation of the quest for status, he does not appear to be offering a timeless formula as to what this will entail in individual cases. Rather, he is making a general point and sounding a warning — an especially important warning, since Christians are all too determined by the status considerations of the world.[3] The general content of Ellul's thought argues against a moralistic interpretation of these words, as do some statements directly related to the issue of humility, as well as some ideas implicit in

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1. Wolfgang Trilling, Matthew, Vol. II, pp. 129-130. Trilling points to the Johannine story of Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet (Jn. 13:1-17) and says that here we have the true example of the first become last, the Lord acting as a humble servant (ibid., p. 130). "For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (Jn. 13:15-17).

2. "Among the Gentiles, greatness is demonstrated by power and authority. In the Church it will not be so: those who hope for places of authority in the kingdom must be servants and slaves of the community. The pattern of slavery and glory is set by the Son of man, who is the first among the disciples, the ruler, and great one /Mtt. 20/ (v. 25). He came into the world not to be served as a King is served by his attendants, but as a servant, to serve others ..." (J.C. Fenton, Saint Matthew, p. 325).

3. See above, p. 119 n.2, for Barth's position on fame and honour, which is very similar.

Ellul's own conduct.

What general ideas argue against the notion that Ellul is simply asking Christians to renounce all positions whereby worldly status might accrue? For one thing, we remember that when he discusses Christian styles of life he stresses the flexible nature of Christian obedience, the idea that God's specific command takes different forms for different individuals. We also recall that when he discusses the use of Scripture and the concreteness of obedience, he is unwilling to offer a casuistry. Because of his belief in the personal God and man's direct responsibility, he could at most offer a relative "practical casuistry", instructional preparation for the event of hearing God's concrete Word.[1] Thus it seems likely that what he is here intending to do is to offer some general ethical convictions which form the context in which individuals are to listen for the particularizing Word which only the Holy Spirit can speak. Were he saying that all Christian lives must be utterly devoid of worldly influence, he would indeed be guilty of the very legalism he is generally so determined to avoid.

Because of Ellul's perfectionism, he is convinced that Christians seeking to witness to Christ must be faithful to Him. Specifically, he thinks that this rules out a Christian tyranny and dominance, which he is convinced is the general way of world leadership. If the Christian is to seek to be perfectly obedient and if the way of worldly power is directly opposed to this, the simple and logical conclusion might seem to be that Christians, insofar as possible, ought to avoid contact with the world, especially participation in leadership roles. Ellul rejects this logical conclusion, for it would mean that Christians would seek to avoid being of the world by simply not being in the world. The whole

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 210.

of his argument concerning agonistic existence refutes such an interpretation. It is true that Ellul, because of his concern for perfectionism, rejects some forms of participation in society. However, it is doubtful that he really intends to encourage a Christian escapism.

It is, of course, very difficult to talk of an outer form of humility without sounding as though Christians are simply to abandon all positions whereby worldly power might accrue. Some words used by Ellul, when taken by themselves, might seem to lend support to this interpretation. When he argues against exalting oneself through the acquisition of riches, social rank, and political power, when he says that Christians seeking to be truly obedient will receive "neither fortune nor honor", it seems that his perfectionism is leading him to a simple sectarianism. He even goes as far as to say that "humility ... is marked by the abandoning of riches and of power".[1] It is doubtful whether such words are really intended to sponsor a Christian retreat from all positions of worldly responsibility. It is true that Ellul often uses extreme language, but he usually qualifies it later. (Our insistence is that one cannot accurately interpret his thought unless one rethinks his extreme general statements in the light of his later qualifications.) Of course, he is frightened concerning the Christian misuse of money and the failure of Christians to realize the dangers of acquisition. Yet after having written a whole book on this very subject, he qualifies his extreme language by warning against the dangers of legalism.[2]

Though Ellul uses strong language concerning humility as involving

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1. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 31.

2. Ellul tells parents that they should help their children to gain true Christian freedom with reference to the use of money; he warns parents not to spell things out in too much detail (L'Homme et l'Argent, p. 158; see also pp. 165-6). For a similar rejection of legalism with reference to money see "L'Argent," in Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses XXVII (1952), pp. 30-50, 63-65.

the abandonment of power,[1] he makes other statements which qualify a legalism at this point. For example, we recall that he appealed to Christian lawyers to defend the poor.[2] To pursue such a course involves, not the simple renunciation of all worldly influence, but the responsible use of one's position for the sake of the poor (of course, on the condition that the methods used are faithful to the Gospel).[3] Similarly, he urged Christians to talk with corporation leaders about the plight of their workers,[4] a task which involves the Christian use of power rather than its total rejection. Though some of his language taken by itself might seem to encourage the utter renunciation of money and worldly influence, other statements clearly indicate that he does

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1. At one place the hyperbolic nature of Ellul's language is obvious, for if the following words were taken literally not even another day of life would be possible for true Christians. He writes, "The fight of faith demands sacrificing one's life, success, money, time, desires" (Violence, p. 165). His real meaning is apparently that obedience to Christ involves extensive sacrifices in such areas.

2. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," pp. 32-33; "Propositions," pp. 42-43.

3. Ellul himself is not always clear on this point. In one context where he advises lawyers to act in this way, he goes on to say, "There is not power without oppression, even if the one who exercizes power is perfect. The law of power is oppression; we remember Jesus. And since the Christian must not oppress anyone, he cannot exercize power whatever it may be. Thus Satan offers Jesus Christ all the power of the world and, to this power Jesus opposes the worship of God" ("L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 33). Ellul's discussion of power would have been helped if he had distinguished between a worldly power, based on oppression, and a Christian use of power or influence, subject to the ways of the Gospel. The fact that he makes such a flat rejection of power here cannot disguise the fact that he asks Christian attorneys to use their influence (power) in the service of the Gospel and in a manner appropriate to the Gospel. It seems that what he really opposes is worldly power, power based on oppression. One wishes he had said more about the power which we see active in Jesus, a power for good consistent with the methods of God. Ellul himself believes in the sovereign power of God (see below, pp. 209ff.) and like traditional theology does see God as in a real sense all-powerful. That being the case, one wishes that he had been more careful to distinguish between Satanic power (which uses ungodly methods) and Christian power (subject to God's methods). In Jesus' temptations, do we not see the choice of the latter kind of power, rather than the simple rejection of power as such?

4. Violence, pp. 151-152.

not himself draw a legalistic conclusion.

Perhaps the strongest argument against the conclusion that Ellul is asking Christians simply to leave the world of power and influence is his own life example. He himself has not withdrawn from worldly influence. If, to Ellul, non-exaltation meant the utter rejection of worldly influence, it is hard to see how he could continue in good conscience to have his books published,[1] let alone be the editor of a prestigious Christian journal, or a professor! He could not do any of these activities if he did not have a degree of worldly influence. Of course he has had many bitter experiences and much personal suffering.[2] This, however, hardly proves that he has had no worldly influence.[3]

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1. Surely the fact that Ellul's books have gotten published is not in itself an indication that he has not been faithful to Christ. He explicitly warns against compromising the content of books for the sake of appealing to a particular reading public (The Technological Society, pp. 418ff.). I assume then that he has not thus compromised his beliefs in writing his books, yet his books have been published! This fact would seem to be contrary to a literal interpretation of some of his statements concerning the Christian's absolute rejection by the world. For example, he writes that "no one will publish a book attacking the real religion of our times, by which I mean the dominant social forces of the technological society" (ibid., p. 418). On the following page he qualifies this statement by saying that such works can be published as long as they are not having the effect of subverting the social order (ibid., p. 419). What is beyond debate is that Ellul has written these very statements in a book which scathingly attacks the technological society and is probably having some effect on that society.

   With reference to so-called "revolutionary" writers Ellul quite rightly remarks (with typical sarcasm!), "I am somehow unable to believe in the revolutionary value of an act which makes the cash register jingle so merrily" (The Technological Society, p. 417). Here he is criticizing the way in which many writers write for the sake of pleasing their readers. This is true and is important to be said, but is a different issue from whether true faithfulness leads to total worldly failure.

2. See above, pp. vi-viii.

3. Even the very statements which seem to equate obedience with rejection by the world are written in books that would not have been published if Ellul had no worldly influence. Of course success in getting one's books published does not prove that one's books are successful in God's eyes. The fact that many people buy Ellul's books does not prove anything about what God may be doing through his witness/...

In our insistence that Ellul does not finally intend to advise Christians to withdraw from the world, we are not trying to soften his words. He definitely does believe that Christian humility must make a difference in outward behaviour. Christians are not to seek self-exaltation and this prohibition should have behavioural consequences for all Christians. The only question is whether some degree of worldly influence is necessarily inconsistent with Christian obedience. The broad context of Ellul's thought, his own life example, and some particular statements, lead to our conclusion that Christians can have some degree of worldly influence.[1]

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witness. We have no argument with his re-definition of Christian success as hidden from general view. All we disagree with are those statements which seem to say that true obedience necessarily leads to total worldly failure.

1. Though we have cited weighty considerations supporting our interpretation, Ellul at places seems to contradict himself by saying that to the very degree that Christians are faithful they will be total failures in the world's eyes. (If this is the case, how can faithful Christians have any degree of worldly influence?) He writes, "The action we attempt will always be regarded by the world as a failure, and the more so the more it is authentically faithful. We cannot be faithful or show the Church to be effective in the world unless we adopt the world's criterion of efficiency, which means adopting its means as well. As the world sees it, action which is faithful to God's will always fail [sic], just as Jesus Christ necessarily went to the cross. Such action always leads to a dead end. It is always a fiasco from the standpoint of worldly power. But this should not worry us. It does not mean that our action is in truth ineffectual. Efficacy measured in terms of faithfulness cannot be compared at any point with efficacy measured in terms of success" (The Politics of God, p. 140; see also Meaning of the City, pp. 37, 182, A Critique, p. 192, The Technological Society, p. 84, and "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 33).

   One can do one of two things when faced with such an interpretative dilemma. One can simply admit that Ellul is not a consistent thinker here. Or one can de-literalize his words, seeing his intent as that of underlining the necessity of Christian suffering, but not really intending the simple equation of faithfulness with total failure. We think that the latter choice has much to be said for it, though one can never prove an author's intentions, when they have to be distinguished from his literal words.

   In support of a de-literalizing is the fact that everything else in this section denies such a simplistic equation. Such ideas as the concreteness of obedience and the non-legalistic nature of the Christian ethic point to major themes of Ellul's thought and thus are not lightly/...

It should be noted that at several places Ellul warns Christians to be on guard when they see money, honours, and high positions coming their way.[1] We have no argument whatsoever with such warnings. In fact, the real value of his position is that he, unlike much popular (and easy) Christian tradition, affirms the importance of Christian suffering and recognizes that faithfulness to Christ involves a strong degree of conflict with the world. One admires Ellul for having had the courage to recover this aspect of primitive Christianity which is seldom stressed today. We can entirely agree that obedience to Christ must surely bring one into a position of receiving less worldly success than one otherwise would. If the way of Christ does not conflict at every point with the actions of the world, it conflicts at many points. If Christians seek to use methods consistent with the Gospel and which witness to it in a world where "getting ahead" involves tyranny and dominion, Christians surely will not "succeed" like good secularists.

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lightly to be relativized. Also, in support of de-literalizing is our discussion on pages 36-41 above, where we saw that Ellul generally admits that Christians can sometimes agree with non-Christians at the level of concrete action. How could Christians ever in good conscience do so if true obedience were always to necessitate total worldly failure? Since a literal reading of his words at this point reveals an immense contradiction with essential elements of his theology, we think it likely that he has simply been careless in his formulation. Last of all, one of the statements seeming to equate faithfulness with total failure occurs in a context that itself seems to deny a literal interpretation. He summarizes the thesis of The Politics of God and the Politics of Man by saying that in II Kings the "good and faithful kings were regularly defeated and the glorious monarchs were like Ahab and Ahaz" (The Politics of God, p. 140). If obedience equalled total failure, how could the good kings have been kings at all? Ellul is surely aware that to be even a good king one would have to have had a degree of worldly success. Likewise, he surely knows that Jesus had a degree of worldly success prior to his rejection on the Cross. (It is hard to even imagine what total failure might mean.) All in all, it seems likely that Ellul is simply guilty of using provocative language, which has the effect of overstating the real point he wants to make. The real point seems to us to be that Christian existence necessarily involves a degree of suffering and failure and that God accomplishes his purposes in and through this — the Politics of God!

1. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," pp. 37-38.

It is surely the case that we often seek to avoid suffering because we are so committed to human "success", popularity, advancement, etc. Ellul's point is an important one and we should not minimize it. We can entirely agree that both inwardly and outwardly the Christian should not seek self-aggrandizement. Anything done for the sake of worldly status is surely an unchristian act.

In the tradition of Ellul's own opposition to legalistic ethics, we insist that the precise form of lowliness must be determined by the living God. Thus it seems to us to be possible to be in positions of responsibility and still to know the meaning of Christian humility — if such is the individual calling to which Christ leads. (We believe that it is impossible to be in such positions without receiving some degree of worldly recognition.) There is something to Luke 14:7-11 to which all Christians must respond; part of the Christian way of life is to seek to avoid unnecessary worldly recognition. However, we interpret this particular teaching within the broader context of the New Testament emphasis on direct obedience to God. We are not prepared to interpret the text legalistically, as though God never calls Christians to leadership positions. It is doubtful that Ellul understands the text this way either, for he admits that Christian faithfulness does not imply that Christians should seek mediocrity.[1]

Christian Suffering

Jacques Ellul believes that suffering is a necessary aspect of the Christian life. He thinks that a life that is faithful to Christ and able to witness to Him will necessarily be a life which includes a great deal of suffering. In addition, he believes that the very task of

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1. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 37.

witnessing to Christ will bring suffering and persecution.[1] We will begin our analysis at this last point.

In Ellul's understanding, one reason the Christian life involves suffering is because the Christian is called to witness to a transcendent Kingdom which calls the way of the world into question. Since the world would rather proceed on its own course, rather than be disturbed by lives and words which imply the necessity of repentance, the world will necessarily be offended by the messengers of the Gospel. (Not every aspect of the Christian life is offensive to the world, since there can be some degree of agreement at the level of concrete activity.) Allegiance to Christ involves a devaluation of many human values, and this devaluation (based on a higher loyalty) results in persecution by the non-believing world.[2] Ellul is quite clear that Christians are not to seek suffering, but are simply to receive the suffering which comes their way when they seek to witness faithfully to Christ in a godless world.[3] He is convinced that if Christians are loyal to Christ they

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1. We have just seen a specific way in which Ellul believes that Christians are to suffer, through a diminishing of worldly success. He gives another indication of the concrete shape of Christian suffering today. He writes, "In the United States, for instance, the fight of faith demands that blacks be accepted totally, that they be granted full equality and also — because they have been oppressed and insulted — that their arrogance, their insults, and their hatred be borne" (Violence, p. 165). This advice is quite general and certainly could not itself be applied to all specific cases. In specific cases it may not be the most loving action merely to bear such insults, though generally speaking the suggestion is helpful.

2. Ellul says that when Christians question the means society uses, this brings about a rupture between them and society and leads to Christian persecution ("Théologie Dogmatique," p. 148). "Whenever there is a conflict, or at least a tension between Christian morality and some other morality, it is the Christian, and he alone, who provokes the tension. The non-Christian is in no way responsible, since he has no reason to see faith's requirement as a higher value" (To Will and To Do, p. 96; see also Presence of the Kingdom, p. 11).

3. "If we are faithful we must expect to be treated by the world as was Jesus Christ. Persecution or failure (in our affairs, in our careers) will come by the action of the world and not by our thirst for martyrdom, which would be quite unhealthy" (Appel, p. 37). An interesting example of what he means by not seeking suffering, is his warning that the Church ought not to endorse political regimes which seek to destroy the Church (False Presence, pp. 35-6).

will receive their share of suffering.[1]

A great deal of biblical support can be given to Ellul's point. D.E. Nineham, commenting on Mark 8:34-38, argues that the early Church saw such a contrast between the holiness of the eternal Kingdom and the sinfulness of the world, that Christians, representing the transcendent Kingdom, would expect to be involved in suffering and persecution by the world.[2] Joachim Jeremias, commenting on the synoptic witness, says:-

> Suffering is part of the service of a messenger, because the world's hate is a normal answer to testimony. This is how it was with the prophets, and this is how it is with the disciples. Woe to you when all people praise you — that is what your fathers did with the false prophets (Luke 6.26). Suffering is almost a hallmark of serving as a messenger. Therefore it has great promise ... (Mtt. 5.12 par.).[3]

Jeremias argues that according to all strata of the synoptic sources Jesus again and again said that suffering forms an inevitable part of the service of a messenger:-[4]

> To agree to follow Jesus means to venture on a life that is as hard as the last walk of a man condemned to death. In Mark 8.34, Jesus is saying that this applies to <u>all</u> who follow him. For everyone, discipleship involves the readiness to tread the lonely road and to bear the people's hatred.[5]

Rudolf Bultmann, in his exposition of the Fourth Gospel, argues that Christian hatred by the world is due to the fact that Christians

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1. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," pp. 35, 37.

2. D.E. Nineham, <u>Saint Mark</u>, Pelican Gospel Commentaries (1963), p. pp. 227-228.

3. Joachim Jeremias, <u>New Testament Theology</u>, Vol. I, p. 240. Notice that in Mtt. 10:17-18 Christian suffering is related to the fact that Christians are to witness to Christ.

4. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 239; see Mtt. 10:16 and Lk. 10:3; Mtt. 5:10-12 and Mtt. 10:16-25.

5. Joachim Jeremias, <u>New Testament Theology</u>, Vol. I, p. 242. Referring to I Thess. 1:6, Ernest Best writes, "The suffering of tribulation becomes almost the normal condition of the Christian (cf. Rom. 5.3; 12.12; Phil. 4.14)" (Ernest Best, <u>The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians</u>, p. 79). He goes on to state that in the New Testament, suffering is not at all seen to be antithetical to Christian joy (see Acts 5:41; 16:25; II Cor. 7:4; 8:1ff.; Phil. 2:17; Col. 1:24; I Pet. 4:13). This is the case because Christian joy is not regarded as the same as mere human/...

relativize human standards and evaluations by their allegiance to a Kingdom not of this world (John 15:18-20; Jn. 17:14-16; I Jn. 3:13-14). Just as Jesus' way led to death, so the way of faithfulness to Christ leads to persecution (Jn. 12:24-6; Jn. 16:1-4).[1]

Ellul's reasoning about Christian suffering is not only based on the conflict which occurs when Christians witness to Christ. He also appeals to Jesus Christ, who, as the "Suffering Servant", is the true model of human life. One must be careful to understand the exact sense in which Ellul understands Jesus Christ as a model or example. Since his primary belief is that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord, his understanding of Christ as the Christian's example must be understood in that context. If Jesus Christ is an example of true human life, He is not so as some merely external pattern, but as the present Lord who leads Christians in ways consistent with His past revelation. In Ellul's thought there are really two ideas which coalesce at this point: the importance of faith in Christ and the belief that faith leads to a life consistent with God's past revelation. In terms of the first understanding, which forms the context for the second, he refers to a Christian ontology of suffering, which is assumed to apply to all who are members of the Church:-

> We are all too much used to a Church which talks, and not used to one which witnesses (a witness is a martyr!). We are used to a Church seeking comfort instead of "completing in the flesh what is lacking in Christ's afflictions". The Church, the body of Christ, suffers the same afflictions which Christ suffered for mankind (Colossians 1:24).[2]

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human joy, but is thought to be based on a relationship to the Holy Spirit (Ernest Best, The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, p. 79).

1. Rudolf Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, Vol. II, p. 76, and The Gospel of John, pp. 507, 555, 563.

2. Theological Foundation of Law, p. 135. "This grace which causes us to enter into the Body of Christ, causes us to participate in the very life/...

In terms of the second understanding, which forms an aspect of the content of Christ's present Lordship, he reminds us that, unlike the followers of Cain, Jesus Christ lived not from human security, but from confidence in God: "'Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.'"[1] Just as Jesus' life was devoid of human security, Ellul believes that the Risen Lord calls His disciples to sacrifice many comforts and securities of life.[2] Christ on the Cross thus becomes for Ellul the model whose example reminds Christians that suffering is an integral aspect of Christian life.

Though Ellul's formulations are not always clear, his meaning is apparently that Jesus Christ is our example, but is so only as He is

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life of Jesus Christ. Now we must remember that Jesus Christ was miserable on earth, was rejected by men, was without hearth or home, was accused unjustly and put to death" ("L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," p. 33). Referring to Phil. 2:3ff., he argues that just as the world did not accept Christ, so Christians as members of Christ's Body should expect to be persecuted by the world. Referring to Mtt. 10:24ff., he says that the Christian servant must expect to be treated as was the Christian's Lord (ibid., pp. 34-35). (We notice that faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord is for Ellul no merely individualistic matter, but involves participation in the Church.)

The following words of E. Earle Ellis are similar to what Ellul has just said: "The Gospel of Luke teaches, and the Book of Acts amply illustrates, that the fate of Jesus is the fate of his followers. If he is attested by God and rejected by men, so are they ... If he has no resting place in this world (9.58), they too are destined to wander, preaching the kingdom of God. The disciples are commanded to carry their cross after Jesus (9.23), and his persecution marks the beginning of their own (22.35ff.). Even Christian martyrdom is described in terms reminiscent of the death of Jesus (23.34; Ac. 760). These parallels are not to be understood merely as an existential imitation of Jesus but as the working out of a corporate relation to Jesus. Jesus' disciples have his Spirit, proclaim his message, bear his cross and share his glory because they are, in Paul's idiom, 'the body of Christ' whose destiny is bound up 'with Christ' (22.28ff. ... 23.43)" (E. Earle Ellis, The Gospel of Luke, New Century Bible (1966), pp. 11-12).

1. Lk. 9:58, quoted in Meaning of the City, p. 121.

2. Ibid., p. 121.

first and foremost our Saviour and Lord.[1]

Ellul is of one mind with Barth when it comes to his understanding of Christian suffering. This is not due to any explicit dependence, but is due to the fact that both take seriously the New Testament witness concerning Christian suffering. Barth tells us that Christian suffering is a matter of ontology:-

> 'The disciple is not above his master nor the servant above his lord ... If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household' (Mt. 10:24f.).[2]

> Real Christians are always men who are oppressed by the surrounding world ... For the Christian nature of his existence would be doubtful to the degree that it experienced no affliction ... coming to terms with the world by means of appeasing compromises ...[3]

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1. "We in the Reformed Church have too much abandoned the imitation of Jesus Christ (which is one of the essential elements of the Christian faith), by forgetting that salvation by grace does not contradict this Imitation" ("Le Pauvre," pp. 125-126). Ellul also refers to Jesus Christ as the model of the good and argues that we must both follow and imitate Him (To Will and To Do, p. 26). In the same book where this last statement appeared, he seems to argue against the importance of an imitation of Christ. He writes, "Christ is not a model, nor an ideal, etc. He is the one who comes in us, and who makes us to be crucified and risen again with him" (ibid., p. 302).
   Ellul is not really contradicting himself in these two types of statements. He gives priority to the emphasis on Jesus Christ as Saviour; he understands the teaching and example of Christ in the context of grace received. (The law is a form of the Gospel.) If Jesus Christ is an example, He is not merely an external one nor is that His exclusive or primary role.
   Ellul also believes that the obedience expected of us has already been accomplished in a representative way in Jesus Christ (To Will and To Do, p. 27, on p. 275 citing Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 55ff.). Our obedience is in grateful response to a salvation freely accomplished in Christ. He insists that there can be no imitation of God's once-and-for-all act of salvation in Christ. Though we can participate in Christ's saving activity flowing from this event, we can neither imitate nor reproduce the salvation event itself (The Politics of God, p. 180).
   From Ellul's emphasis on the flexible nature of the Christian ethic, we know that he would not be pleased with any approach to the imitation of Christ which is nothing more than an uncreative effort to inflexibly repeat Jesus' deeds and words ("Le Sens da la Liberté," pp. 16-17). Granted these reservations and these convictions about the context in which imitation should occur, he does seem to affirm the importance of an imitation of Christ.
2. Barth IV/2, p. 264.
3. Barth IV/3, Second Half, pp. 618-619.

Like Ellul, he sees Jesus Christ as the model to be followed through participation in Christ, rather than as a mere external example.[1] Barth also decisively links the cause of Christian affliction with the Christian's task of witnessing.[2] Like Ellul, he is careful to warn Christians that they are not to go looking for suffering, but are to accept the suffering which comes their way in God's gracious providence, as they assume their God-appointed tasks as witnesses. In characteristic humour, Barth points out that Daniel in the lion's den did not take it upon himself to walk over and pull the lion's tail! Likewise, Christians are not called to a life of unnecessary anguish, but to a life of faithfulness.[3] If we are faithful to God we will have our share of suffering. No-one need worry that there will be no cross for him to bear.[4]

A person who has generally influenced both Barth and Ellul and who has probably influenced Ellul at this point is Søren Kierkegaard. (Ellul has read his Journals and many references to suffering occur therein.)[5] Kierkegaard was obsessed with the theme of Christian suffering.[6] He saw the suffering Christ as the model of true human existence,

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1. Barth IV/3, Second Half, p. 638.
2. "The Christian is not hated as a human individual who is repulsive to the one who hates him on account of his personal being and action. He is hated as the bearer and representative of a specific claim and cause ... They represent to all men and to the world the alien and intolerable cause of the kingdom, the coup d'état of God" (Barth IV/3, Second Half, p. 625). "It is just because he is a witness of Jesus Christ, and to the extent that he is active as such, that affliction comes upon him from without, from the world in the face of which he stands" (ibid., p. 615). "His affliction arises quite simply from the fact that the world cannot accept this demand and challenge, and the less so the more clearly it realises what is at issue" (ibid., p. 621; see also p. 640).
3. Barth IV/2, p. 546.
4. Ibid., p. 613.
5. Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 111, 139.
6. Kierkegaard, The Journals, pp. 89, 111, 171, 190, 225-7.

but like Ellul believed that Christ must be first and primarily understood as Saviour.[1] He also affirmed an ontology of suffering.[2] "Little by little I noticed increasingly that all those whom God really loved, the examples etc. had all had to suffer in this world ... To be loved by God and to love God is to suffer."[3] He also directly related the suffering nature of the Christian life to the missionary purpose of Christian existence.[4] He believed that to resemble truth in a world of untruth brought one into a state of lowliness, humiliation and suffering.[5]

Christian Love

Ellul's understanding of Christian love is the expression of his perfectionism. In discussing Christian love, he is again trying to describe the shape of the Christian life which he believes is able to witness to Christ, because it is faithful to Him.

He speaks of Christian love as qualitatively different from what the world knows as love. It is patterned on and is in response to the sacrificial love revealed on the Cross (see Rom. 5:8; I John 3:16; I Jn. 4:9-13,19). He fully accepts the legitimacy of the agape-eros distinc-

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1. Kierkegaard, The Last Years, p. 74; The Journals, pp. 164, 166. "Just try to imagine quite clearly to yourself that the model is called a 'Lamb', that alone is a scandal to natural man, no one has any desire to be a lamb" (The Journals, p. 166). "Jesus Christ the Savior of the world lives in poverty and humiliation, then is persecuted and hated, finally is tortured in every way and crucified. His teaching is essentially his life. So what he says is essentially, Follow me; hate yourself; forsake everything; crucify the flesh; take up your cross ..." (The Last Years, p. 86).

2. The Last Years, p. 109.

3. The Journals, p. 225. "The fact that one believes can only be proved in one way: being willing to suffer for one's faith. And the degree of one's faith is proved only by the degree of one's willingness to suffer for one's faith" (Kierkegaard, Attack upon 'Christendom', p. 271; see also pp. 34-35).

4. Kierkegaard, The Journals, p. 173; The Last Years, pp. 51-52.

5. Kierkegaard, Training in Christianity, p. 191; The Last Years, p. 132.

tion.[1] Eros seeks to possess and dominate; agape seeks to give of itself.[2] Ellul thinks that Christian love is precisely sacrificial love, agape love, the love of Christ for sinners, the love of Christians for their enemies.[3] He, like Barth,[4] stresses the priority and necessity of love for God if love for the neighbour is to be of a Christian nature (Mtt. 22:37-40; Mk. 12:28-31; Lk. 10:25-8). He tells us that man can rediscover the neighbour only when he knows himself as having been found by God.[5] He believes that the Holy Spirit alone can overcome the separation between men and enable the humble love of our fellow-men.[6] Ellul, however, does not deny that our fellowship with Christ is built up by our service to Christ, who is present incognito in the need of our fellow-men (Mtt. 25:40,45).[7] Though he stresses the priority of man's vertical relationship with God as determining man's horizontal relationship with his fellow-men, he also recognizes and accepts the converse. While recognizing a real distinction between the command to love God and the command to love one's neighbour, he insists that a proper relationship with God must of necessity lead to a love for one's fellow-men.[8]

Ellul sees Christian love as contradicting our natural tendency to prefer ourselves,[9] thus he cannot agree with Reinhold Niebuhr's dialectical

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1. Ellul cites his approval of Anders Nygren's exposition of this theme in Agape and Eros ("L'Argent," p. 42; see Agape and Eros, pp. 91ff., 101-2, 132; see also Bonhoeffer, Ethics, pp. 173-5). The supernaturalism of Ellul's understanding of love is also shared by Barth (see I/2, p. 373).
2. Violence, p. 167.
3. Ibid., pp. 165-8, 172; Métamorphose, p. 117.
4. Barth I/2, pp. 381ff., 412.
5. Presence of the Kingdom, p. 95; To Will and To Do, p. 85.
6. Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 127-8.
7. Violence, pp. 123, 135.
8. Prayer and Modern Man, p. 164.
9. Violence, pp. 166-7.

way of understanding the relationship between mutual love and sacrificial love. He can't agree with Niebuhr's tendency to see the requirements of God as extensions of the morality of the world.[1] The difference between the two men in their understanding of love has to do with Ellul's supernaturalism. He thinks of agape not only within the context of the example of Christ's love, but decisively within the context of a personal response to God's love in Christ, made possible by a participation in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22; Eph. 3:14-19). Once Christian love is understood in terms of a covenant relationship with the Holy Spirit, it is much more difficult to draw up a dialectical relationship between natural love (even altruistic concern) and Christian sacrificial love.[2] Ellul does not deny the possibility of a degree of altruism on the part of non-Christians, but it is true that he doesn't think that non-Christians love their enemies (Mtt. 5:43-8; Lk. 6:27ff.) -- and love for enemies is for him the essence of Christian love. He is insistent that altruism of itself is not Christian love, for the latter assumes a relationship with God.[3]

Ellul not only speaks of Christian love as decisively love for enemies,[4] but also looks to the patient, forgiving love defined in I Cor. 13 as a model.[5] His references to love occur in his book Violence

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 289.

2. See ibid., p. 289.

3. Earlier we pointed out that Ellul raises the question whether Niebuhr is not guilty of idealism (see above, pp. 97-98 and fn.). The question we raised there, as applied here, is whether the way Niebuhr relates eros to agape does not leave the Holy Spirit with no real task to perform. If agape is merely the rational application of a love known to all men (mutual love), what is the role of the Holy Spirit? (see also above, p. 30, n. 2). Of course, Niebuhr would add that agape is the norm for the application of this natural love. Our question is simply whether agape as a mere norm really measures up to the New Testament understanding.

4. Violence, p. 172.

5. Ibid., p. 58.

where he is striving to define the Christian way of life over against the tendency to love only those who stand on one side of an ideological battle line.[1] The meaning of love for one's enemies is thought out precisely in this context and his conclusion is that it is sentimental nonsense to think that we can love an enemy we are in the process of killing.[2] To love is to have sacrificial concern for all those for whom Christ died. To Ellul's mind, to reject this all-inclusive love for all men is to reject the Incarnation of God's love in Jesus Christ.[3] It is to choose a theology of revolution, rather than a theology of reconciliation.[4] "A theology of violence calls for discrimination for or against certain men; therefore it must deny the Father who loves all men equally."[5] Ellul links the theology of selective love with the theology which denies God's incarnate love for the world.[6] It is an

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1. Violence, pp. 16-17, 99.

2. Ibid., p. 7.

3. Ellul admits that others may accuse him of condoning the violence of the oppressor because he is not willing to resort to violence to help the oppressed (Violence, p. 136). "Naturally, there are those who will protest: 'But can anyone say that he loves the exploited poor of South Africa when he does nothing for them; and can anything be done without violence?" (ibid., p. 130). He does not seem to answer directly these charges that he himself raises, but refers to the opposition between the order of necessity and the way of Christ (ibid., p. 130). Perhaps his real answer is to be found where he says that "in the face of the tragic problem of violence, the first truth to be discerned is that, whatever side he takes, the Christian can never have an easy conscience and never feel that he is pursuing the way of truth" (ibid., p. 138). In other words, he answers his own question by saying that even the Christian position of non-violence involves guilt. Nevertheless, he still feels that Christian truth lies with the way of non-violence and that those who engage in violence also have guilt (even more?) on their hands.

4. Violence, pp. 74-75.

5. Ibid., p. 75.

6. Ibid., p. 74. It is interesting that he finds the basis of modern Christians' defence of violence in a denial of man's vertical relationship with God (ibid., pp. 60, 74-5), which in turn leads to a selective love for one's fellow-men, a love defined by ideology and not by revelation (ibid., p. 72). Ellul, like Barth, is opposed to the humanistic distortion of the Christian faith. He even thinks that humanism is related/...

interesting indication of the situational setting of his theology that within the context of a discussion on violence, he utilizes the Incarnation as the decisive factor and indicates that the Incarnation implies love for one's enemies. A strength of Ellul's approach to theology is precisely the fact that he sets theology within the context of discussions of particular moral problems.

The problem in Ellul's discussion of Christian love is that he tends to define it in a one-sidedly personal way. That he does this is rather surprising, since he himself criticizes the revolutionaries for defending a love which discriminates against some men and favours others.[1] One wonders whether Ellul is not somewhat guilty of his own criticism when he sees Christian love as having to do with only one group of people --- those who are near at hand. It's understandable that he would be critical of those who assure themselves of their own righteousness by having a general love of humanity, but who do nothing on behalf of those in need. It's easy to love humanity and hard to love people! This is the positive point he has to make. He is arguing for the importance of individual responsibility and direct personal acts of love.[2] There is

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related to an ideology which is only selectively humanistic. It neither teaches nor enables a love for enemies, though it may on occasion encourage altruism.

1. Violence, p. 75.

2. "Le Pauvre," p. 124. "We should not suppose that we have taken action on the world's suffering because we have signed a petition on behalf of the Hungarians or the Algerians, or because we have demonstrated in the streets, or have given the price of a meal to alleviate world famine. Those are evil little substitutes for grace. They are the not-too-innocent ploys of the devil" (False Presence, p. 71). He argues that Christians need not suffer by taking the whole misery of the world on their shoulders. He believes that Jesus Christ alone bears such vast suffering. Though Ellul admits that Christians are not to be indifferent to mankind's sufferings, he insists that the Christian's only concern is with human problems near enough for Christians to be able to do something about them (False Presence, pp. 70-71). This formulation can be criticized on at least two counts: (1) If Christians are to pray for the needs of the world, then they ought also/...

plenty of biblical support for the notion that Christian love should include and perhaps even put great stress on individual personal activity on behalf of those in need. What we feel needs to be criticized in Ellul's formulation is the way he (to our mind) over-extends his argument by entirely rejecting the idea that Christians are also called to express love through less personal channels. We wonder whether Ellul, in taking this further step, does not inadvertently superimpose a personalistic philosophy on the Bible, a philosophy which does not seem to us even to do justice to the very texts on which he bases his contention.

He criticizes what he calls the theory of "distant relationships". This theory affirms that Christians are called to love their fellow-men throughout the whole world. Of this theory Ellul writes: "It rejects the antinomy between one's neighbor, the individual nearby, and a co-partner, that is to say, the person with whom I have only societal relations, to whom I am bound solely by sociological ties."[1] This view believes that Christian charity relates to social institutions as well as to personal encounter.[2]

Before Ellul totally denounces this theory (which is precisely what

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also to have a feeling of suffering in concern for world tragedy; (2) It can also be argued that Christians really can do significant things on behalf of distant neighbours.

Ellul says that Marxism rightly criticized the tendency to forget collective responsibility by hiding behind individual virtue. Though he thinks this criticism was justified in the nineteenth century, he thinks the problem is just the opposite today. He believes that people avoid individual responsibility by looking to political mechanisms to solve their problems (The Political Illusion, pp. 188, 190). While recognizing the importance of individual responsibility, we wonder if there is not still truth in the Marxist charge and truth over against Ellul's own tendency to confine love to personal relationships. (For a related oversimplification see above, p. 64 n. 1).

1. False Presence, p. 65.

2. Ibid., pp. 65-66.

he does do!), he gives some words of qualification.[1] He says that this view is correct in its denunciation of "the shrunken view of charity in the bourgeois outlook", the bourgeois tendency to use personal relationships as a form of escape from responsibility for the downtrodden.[2] Here he admits that charity "sometimes operates through the copartner relationship".[3] "We can readily agree in denouncing an eschatology ... which condemns the world of the copartner in order to retreat into the dream of small prophetic communities."[4] Ellul's personalistic interpretation of Christian love is different from the bourgeois view, in that it involves a much more costly and demanding form of obedience. However, his apparent admission that Christian love can sometimes operate through a copartner relationship flatly contradicts what he says a few sentences later when he writes, "It seems to us that the theory of distant relationships is quite heretical and anti-biblical."[5] This latter

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1. That he will flatly reject this view, but a few sentences earlier appear not to do so, is typical of his tortuous writing style.

2. False Presence, p. 66; see also The Political Illusion, p. 188, and L'Homme et l'Argent, p. 18. "Charity, perfect love, without fault and without end — had, in the hands of the bourgeois, been reduced to charity. Your conscience was at peace when you had done charity. You did it so you wouldn't have to feel it. It was a screen for injustice and a compensation for the oppression that the necessities of work, money, and progress forced us to inflict on others. The oppressor is always ready to offer charity to the oppressed. In this way he demonstrates his noble sentiments toward him" (A Critique, p. 288). Elsewhere Ellul criticizes the bourgeoisie for excluding love for one's enemies from Christianity (Métamorphose, p. 117).

3. False Presence, p. 66.

4. Ibid., p. 66.

5. Ibid., p. 66; see also pp. 69-70. Jürgen Moltmann's description of religion as "the cult of the New Subjectivity" seems to apply to Ellul's thought at this point (Moltmann, Theology of Hope, pp. 311ff.). Moltmann points out that in this view Christian love abandons all effort to relate to the social order and becomes confined to the immediate I-Thou relationship (ibid., p. 315). "The 'neighbour' who is the object of Christian love is then the man who encounters us at any given moment, our fellow man in his selfhood, but he can no longer be known, respected and loved in his juridical person and his social role. Our 'neighbour' comes on the scene only in personal encounter, but not in his/...

statement appears to represent his true position.

What is the basis of Ellul's belief that Christian love is an entirely interpersonal matter, incapable both of motivating concern for an unknown neighbour and of being able to operate through impersonal channels? His argument is based partially on his resistance to necessities which he believes the modern world is forcing on Christians and partially on biblical exegesis and theological interpretation. In the first aspect of his argument, he says that modern society is forcing Christians to rethink Christian love in a broader social context than was originally the case for New Testament Christians. While not denying that a changed situation exists,[1] he says that it is a false question to ask how Christianity can be rethought in terms of this new situation of social interdependence. It is his belief that the fact that we live in a society no longer based on personal relationships, but on the media and on complex corporate realities, in no way justifies the Christian modification of the biblical understanding of love.[2] Over against the new view of love, which he believes is due to adaptation to the world, he insists on the traditional view (by which he apparently means the Christian view).[3] "The traditional idea was that this love had to do

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his social reality. It is the man within arm's length or at our door who is our neighbour, but not man as he appears in the social and juridical order, in questions of aid to underdeveloped countries and race relationships, in social callings, roles and claims" (Moltmann, Theology of Hope, p. 315).

1. Ellul refers to the interrelationships created by the mass media and the speed of communication, which lead to worldwide collective interests (False Presence, p. 63). He admits that events now have worldwide repercussions: "Every event throughout the world has its repercussions on all, and we can no longer remain indifferent, for we are subjected to the aftereffects of economic and political decisions the world over. Conversely, our decisions have their repercussions on everyone else ... Henceforth our lives are truly bound up with the lives of all" (False Presence, p. 63).

2. Ibid., pp. 66-68.

3. Ibid., pp. 62-63.

with a person of one's acquaintance, to whom one was close, and that love would only take place in the proximity of person to person."[1]

Ellul is, of course, correct that the world situation has drastically changed. The question which arises is whether the faithful Christian response is to meet this changed situation with a flat rejection of the use of social channels for expressing Christian concern or whether the Christian should seek to be faithful by creatively making use of such channels, insofar as one can do so without compromising Christian obedience.[2] Only on one condition can the response of absolute rejection of such channels be identified with the Christian response and that is if the Bible clearly articulates an ontology of love which defines Christian love as one-sidedly personal. (The mere fact that he claims that this is the case does not prove that it is.) The decisive argument with Ellul's view has to be exegetical. Unless the biblical view is as he thinks, there is no reason why the form of Christian responsibility should involve such a head-on clash with modern developments. One might even argue that to ignore totally the changed situation may be an unfaithful response. If the world situation has changed, to confine love to person to person relationships may be to unnecessarily limit the scope of love.

We will now consider Ellul's theological and biblical reasoning, which leads him to affirm a one-sidedly personal understanding of Christian love. His argument is that to try to love all men is to assume a task reserved for God alone.[3] "Love exercized through distant relationship is simply hypocrisy, because it goes beyond the human possibilities,

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1. False Presence, p. 63.

2. Perhaps Ellul assumes that any use of social channels necessitates Christian compromise, but is such a simplistic assumption really tenable?

3. False Presence, pp. 67-68.

and is an idealism which avoids the reality of the love shown forth in scripture ... It is dreadful to confuse a 'public service' with the service of love."[1] On the basis of the parable of the Good Samaritan he says that God does not command Christians to love mankind, but to love the neighbour at hand.[2] He generalizes that every scriptural act of love "involves causing a person to come out of his status of anonymity ... in order, through a purely personal relationship, to transform him into a person known and distinguished by name."[3] He believes that the Christian is not engaged in Christian charity as long as he is involved at the level of collective concern or institutional reform. Charity only "takes place when the collective misfortune becomes so personalized in this neighbor that it fades out as 'collective' and as 'status' in order to leave only the bleeding flesh and soul".[4]

We must carefully evaluate Ellul's point here, since if true it does lead to the conclusion that Christian love has no interest in non-personal forms of expression. We earlier referred to his statement where he goes as far as to define the Christian view of love as having to do with a relationship with a close acquaintance.[5] It is true that the story of the Good Samaritan describes personal service, but it certainly does not describe a service bordering on friendship. The Samaritan is not said to have had any previous knowledge of the person

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1. False Presence, p. 68.
2. "The commandment which is given us is very clear. It does not have to do with ... mankind, nor even with neighbors, but with a single person, your neighbor. The explanation is also simple. Jesus shows how the good Samaritan transformed the relationship with a co-partner (Samaritan — Jew, which is not a love relationship, and which love neither covers nor touches) into a relationship with a neighbor, exclusive of all others" (False Presence, p. 68).
3. False Presence, p. 68.
4. Ibid., p. 69.
5. Ibid., p. 63.

at the side of the road, nor does the Samaritan remain on the scene after his service has been performed (Lk. 10:25-37). In emphasizing the personal nature of love, one wonders whether Ellul is not confusing his own careful distinction between agape and eros, and thinking of Christian love all too exclusively in the context of the self-fulfilment which comes from personal service. (Of course, personal service is important; we are only debating whether it alone is of Christian importance.)

In examining the parable of the Good Samaritan, one also wonders if Ellul, by his one-sided emphasis on serving the near neighbour, is not raising the very question the story intends to silence. The lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbour?" (Lk. 10:29). The parable refrains from answering that question and in so doing seems to point away from any limiting definition as to who is or is not a Christian's neighbour. Instead, the story talks about being a neighbour to those in need (Lk. 10:36). It may be right to stress the personal nature of the Samaritan's service to remind Christians that love needs to include individual acts of love. However, the rejection of the question "Who is my neighbour?" seems to argue against a one-sidedly personalistic interpretation, which would define the Christian neighbour as those alone who are near at hand.[1] Of course it is true that first-century Christians did not have

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1. Commenting on Luke 10:25-37 G.B. Caird writes, "He tells the story of the Good Samaritan, not to answer the question 'Who is my neighbour?' but to show that it is the wrong question. The proper question is, 'To whom can I be a neighbour?'; and the answer is, 'To anyone whose need constitutes a claim on my love'. It is neighbourliness, not neighbourhood, that makes a neighbour" (G.B. Caird, Saint Luke, p. 148). Victor Paul Furnish writes, "As Ernst Fuchs perceptively notes, while the rabbis emphasized the periphery of the circle within which neighbor love should be operative and discussed the problem of a longer or shorter radius, this parable stresses the midpoint of that circle (love) and allows the periphery to extend endlessly outward. Concrete deeds of love, not casuistic definitions of love's limits, should be of concern" (Victor Paul Furnish, The Love Command, p. 45; see also pp. 40, 60, 64).

the many opportunities we have to express love through impersonal channels. Their world was smaller; by and large they were not even aware of distant needs, simply because the means of mass communication did not exist. (Paul's collection for the Jerusalem Church may be a kind of exception and we wonder what Ellul would do with Paul's example? Surely the Christians who made the donations for the Jerusalem Christians did not personally know the recipients. If the deed can be said to be personal, because it involved Paul as the direct mediator, it can also be said to be impersonal, because those making the donations did not know the recipients.) One wonders whether Ellul has not resorted to an extremely dubious hermeneutic, interpreting Christian love in the context of the social and technical limitations of the first century, rather than in the light of implicit theological meaning, which could later be legitimately expanded (in the light of the changed social situation) to encourage a wider Christian expression of love.

We also wonder whether Ellul has not made a major exegetical mistake when he makes such a rigid distinction between the love which God has for all men and the Christian's love, which is limited to the neighbour near at hand. He claims to affirm the importance of a Christian love for one's enemies. In fact, that is where he sees the practical difference between Christian love and mere humanistic love. If one studies Mtt. 5:43-8 (see also Lk. 6:27-8,32-6) it becomes apparent that the distinction Ellul draws between God's wide concern and the Christian's narrow concern is not present in the texts. Quite to the contrary, the Christian is encouraged to love the enemy precisely because God the Creator sends His providential blessings on all men. The reasoning seems to be that just as God is indiscriminate in His love, so Christians are to imitate this kind of indiscriminate love (Mtt. 5:48). If the intention of the texts had been to limit love for the enemy to

those near at hand, it is puzzling why the injunction to love was set in the context of God's wide and inclusive providential care.[1] (It is very strange that he here rejects the notion that Christians are to imitate God, since at other places he emphasizes that very point.)

Not only are we unconvinced of the exegetical basis of Ellul's thought at this point, we are puzzled why he regards love exercized through distant relationships as necessarily hypocritical, because it goes beyond human possibilities.[2] Even the briefest acquaintance with his ethical thought indicates that he generally regards Christian obedience as beyond human possibility![3] In this very section we have seen that he understands Christian love as a supernatural possibility.[4]

We are also unhappy with the absolute distinction he makes between the service of love and public service.[5] Were Ellul really to maintain such a distinction, he would need to affirm a traditional "Two Kingdom" doctrine, since there would be no possibility that the regular affairs of daily life could become channels through which Christians might express their loyalty to Christ.[6]

Another argument Ellul uses in favour of confining Christian love to the interpersonal sphere is based on the fact that "in revealing to us what love is, Christ precisely did not come as Pantocrator, but as Jesus, that is to say, localized. He addressed himself to a very small number of persons with whom he established personal relations, and he moved away from their socio-political culture."[7] There seem to be three

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1. See J.C. Fenton, Saint Matthew, p. 93.
2. False Presence, p. 68.
3. To Will and To Do, p. 267.
4. See above, pp. 194-195.
5. False Presence, p. 68.
6. See below, pp. 299-300.
7. False Presence, p. 69.

assertions in this statement. First, on Ellul's own terms it can be debated whether the Object of faith is simply the words and deeds of the Jesus of history.[1] He customarily thinks of the Christ event in the broad context of salvation history leading to, including, and stemming from the Incarnation. If theology emphasizes Christ as the Risen Lord, and not merely as God's past revelation, it is not so easy to argue for a localism on the basis of the Christ event. The Risen Lord now reaches out to the whole world. Secondly, one can ask again whether Ellul is not simply deifying first-century conditions. Of course Jesus addressed only a small number of people. Though He might have spoken to more people than He actually did, the absence of the means of mass communication of itself contributed to a localism. Is not the assertion that Jesus' localism must be ours a deifying of the non-technical society?[2] Third, Ellul assumes that Jesus was detached from the socio-political culture of His day. It may be true that Jesus did not take an interest in political questions.[3] We will deal with the issue of Christian participation in politics in Chapter Seven.[4] Here it is enough to note that even if one rejected direct political participation (which Ellul doesn't simply do, though he sometimes seems to), this would not necessitate confining love to the personal realm. The social realm is broader than politics as such.

While keeping in mind the critical questions we have been discussing, we now look at some precise implications which flow from Ellul's argument. We notice that he talks of the importance of Christian stewardship on behalf of the poor, but insists that the gift of money

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1. False Presence, p. 56; L'Evangile Hier et Aujourd'hui, p. 187.
2. We have seen earlier that Ellul sometimes declares technology to be inherently bad (see above, p. 23, n. 2).
3. See below, p. 263.
4. Pp. 250ff.

must never be anonymous, but must be an act of personal self-giving.[1] If our criticisms above are correct, this is an unnecessary overstatement. The argument that all Christian stewardship must be of a personal nature rests simply on the prior assumption that Christian love can never be expressed through impersonal channels.

A further implication of Ellul's one-sidedly personalistic understanding of the expression of Christian love is his rejection of Christian participation in society's programmes and institutions.[2] He is in the strange position of claiming great concern for the poor but, because of his personalistic philosophy, having to reject many channels through which Christians might express such concern. Even if one accepts his thesis concerning the purpose of the Christian life and the necessity of using methods consistent with that purpose, one might still disagree that this absolutely rules out all involvement in society's programmes and institutions. Though many aspects of political reality may necessitate the compromising of Christian methods, is this true of all social participation? For example, would Christian support for the welfare services of the state necessarily involve a compromising of Christian conviction? Might not a Christian even work through such channels as a direct expression of his Christian love? Is Ellul right in arguing that a Christian support for programmes and institutions is necessarily a flight into the mass, a retreat from God? May not the total unwillingness to consider responsible participation in such channels be precisely a flight from God, because it unnecessarily eliminates a whole area where Christians could

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1. "L'Argent," p. 63.

2. "Here, as on many other points, Christianity refuses the system. The response to the poor will not find us adhering to any group or program. To seek to respond by entering a party, by accepting a program, by working in an institution is a refusal of responsibility, is a flight into the mass before the question of God" ("Le Pauvre," p. 124; see also L'Homme et l'Argent, p. 210).

be of service to their neighbours?

The conclusion seems inescapable that Ellul's personalistic philosophy has had a distorting influence on the outworking of his understanding of Christian love. In the first several pages of this section we stated some of his general views about Christian love and found no reason to criticize them. In the remaining pages we have dealt with the problem involved in Ellul's interpretation, the fact that he narrows the scope of Christian love. We believe that the latter tendency is not only not necessitated by the earlier insights, but stands in contradiction to a real emphasis on loving one's enemies.

CHAPTER VI

CHAPTER VI

CHRIST'S LORDSHIP OVER A REBELLIOUS WORLD

Opposition to the Sacralizing of History

Ellul's theology is very much a theology of the Word. A theology of the Word relates to history, but is not a theology of history. The difference is that a theology of the Word takes seriously man's radical sinfulness and hence cannot equate man's sinful history with God's self-manifestation.[1] In a theology of the Word, history is understood as the battleground between God and Satan, rather than as the natural revelation of God. The sovereignty

1. A modern representative of the theology of history position is Wolfhart Pannenberg. He sees God's revelation, not as the prophet's interpretive Word, but as the whole world process (Robinson and Cobb, editors, Theology as History, pp. 18-19, 63, 185, 239). Likewise, he blurs the distinction between faith and mere rational knowledge, so much so that the very basis of the Christian faith is seen as dependent on the relativities of historical research (ibid., p. 274). Though many of the things which Pannenberg says are both helpful and genuinely Christian, it is nevertheless the case that he is unashamedly a rationalist! (ibid., pp. 226-7).
   It is important to recognize that Jürgen Moltmann's position is different from Pannenberg's at this point (since they are often considered together). Moltmann writes, "The decisive question, is whether 'revelation' is the illuminating interpretation of an existing obscure life process in history, or whether revelation itself originates, drives and directs the process of history; whether consequently as Barth has asked, revelation is a predicate of history, or whether history has to be understood as a predicate of the eschatological revelation and to be experienced, expected and obediently willed as such" (Moltmann, Theology of Hope, pp. 75-76; see also p. 71). He explicitly disagrees with the school of Federal theology which understood the world as a progressive revelation of God (ibid., p. 69). He points out that the theology of progressive revelation led to the cultural Christianity of the 19th century, which identified the present stage of cultural evolution with the true manifestation of Christianity (ibid., p. 75). He says that Pannenberg has himself moved away from the Old Testament insight that history happens between promise and fulfilment and has instead come to affirm the Greek view that God reveals Himself in the total process of history (ibid., pp. 77-9).

of God is understood as the belief that God is able to work creatively even in the midst of sin to accomplish His purposes.[1] However, it is thought that God's purposes cannot be read directly from the horizon of what is happening in public history.

Ellul is critical of those who say that the world is objectively reconciled to God and ignore the negative judgments on the world found abundantly in the New Testament.[2] He is opposed to a Christian idealism which minimizes the radical sinfulness of the world[3] because it wants to be in step with the times.

> It is a mistake and one that is made again and again, to fasten an undue interpretation on the text 'God so loved the world', to assume that it implies that the world is not so bad after all ... I believe that the meaning of that passage is precisely the opposite. It is because the world is radically, totally evil that nothing less would do than the gift of God's Son. 4

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1. The Meaning of the City, p. 132; The Judgment of Jonah, pp. 53-4; The Politics of God, p. 99.

2. Violence, pp. 71-2.

3. Violence, p. 122; A Critique, p. 252.

4. Violence, p. 26. "It must be remembered that the lordship of Jesus Christ over the world does not at all signify a restoration of the creation to its integrity. The world is no more restored in its concrete existence than I cease to be a sinner because pardoned ..." (False Presence, p. 16). Ellul believes in the sovereignty of Christ over the world, but he understands that lordship to be a deeply hidden reality. "If the incarnation has a meaning it can only be that God came into the most abominable of places (and he did not, by his coming, either validate or change that place). The 'Lordship of Jesus Christ' does not mean that everything that happens, happens by the decision of that Lord. No, the world remains the world, but whether or not it knows it the world is subject to that Lord " (Violence, p. 25).
Ellul believes that Christ's death and resurrection did not structurally eliminate sin from the world. "The death of Jesus Christ does not mean that a strange power which has conditioned history thus far has been annihilated. History and society are still very much subject to constraints " (The Politics of God, p. 187). "Christ's victory is not visible in the world of reality: there is no obvious proof of it " (The Meaning of the City, p. 165). "This defeat is in Christ's sight, not in ours " (ibid., p. 166).
An important aspect of Ellul's criticism of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin is that he thinks Teilhard minimizes the real sinfulness of the world, deifying the natural process of history (see below, p. 221 et seq., n.4, for a different though related criticism). Ellul accuses the bourgeoisie of inverting the Incarnation. In place of the biblical view that God came into a lost world, the bourgeois optimists claimed that the world was itself becoming divine (Métamorphose/...

Instead of declaring the world to be good, he believes that we should distance ourselves from the tendencies and movements of society, "being in the world but not of it."[1]

John Marsh has developed a distinction which may be helpful for the purposes of understanding Ellul's theology of the Word. He makes a distinction between what takes place and what God is doing amid what happens.[2] "The advantage of the distinction ... is that it does not establish two realms but remains one."[3] This kind of a distinction serves as a protection against the simple identification of external history with God's intentional will. It supports a "dialectical" understanding of history. God is seen to be truly involved in public history, but God's purposes can be perceived only in faith. This distinction also serves as a protection

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(Métamorphose, p. 152). He believes that Teilhard represents "the culmination of bourgeois thought" (ibid., p. 159). He thinks Teilhard naively deifies trends by interpreting them in the light of evolutionary dogma. Ellul sees it as illegitimate to transpose evolutionary theory from the biological realm to the realm of human history. He thinks that there is no moral progress to correspond with the biological evolution of human life. He thus thinks that Teilhard's theories are utopian and lacking in realism. Ellul cannot agree that the world is implicitly Christian (Violence, p. 123).

Another example of the sort of thought which Ellul opposes is that of Paul Lehmann. (He does not criticize Lehmann as such, but does so indirectly by criticizing his pupil Richard Schaul [Violence, pp. 50-56]). James M. Gustafson's summary of Lehmann's position is brilliant and points to the very thing Ellul opposes. Gustafson writes, "Paul Lehmann, for example, builds his Christian ethic upon the idea that in the lordship of Christ a new humanity has been given. The world is to be regarded in the light of the victory of Christ over the powers of sin, death, and law. Both believers and unbelievers are confronted by an environment 'being shaped by Christ's royal and redemptive activity'" (James M. Gustafson, Christian Ethics, p. 60). (Of course, Lehmann's ideas are themselves based on some provocative utterances by the later Bonhoeffer.)

1. Violence, p. 26.
2. John Marsh, Saint John, pp. 18, 47-48.
3. John Marsh, Saint John, p. 77.

against a pietistic or existentialist approach, whereby God's activity is seen to be confined to the inner realm.

An awareness of John Calvin's position on the sovereignty of God also helps us to understand Ellul's position. In the history of Christian theology, Calvin's name stands out as one who emphasizes the sovereignty of God; yet, Calvin's theology, unlike Hegel's, was a theology of the Word, not a theology of history. His position was based on the belief in a transcendent and personal God active in history. He believed that God has an active intention in all that happens, but he also believed that the Devil and sinful men have active intentions in all events.[1] Though Calvin was confident of the hidden sovereignty of God over the world, his belief in the fallenness of man prevented him from thinking that God's intention could be determined by looking at world history as such. For him, the clue for understanding the meaning of God's lordship over the world is the spiritual effort to listen for the Word of God's intention and responding to that. Calvin was not at all saying that the demonic is inactive in history or that the whole movement or direction of history is toward the self-realization of God's will. He believed that God may indeed intend something in everything that occurs, but that intention was not seen to be obvious or self-evident. Calvin's position, like Ellul's, is tenable only if one believes that in a real sense God is more powerful and wiser than the evil which He opposes.[2]

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1. John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Vol. I (1960), pp. 310-311.

2. "The Christian heart, since it has been thoroughly persuaded that all things happen by God's plan, and that nothing takes place by chance, will ever look to him as the principal cause of things, yet will give attention to the secondary causes in their proper place" (ibid., p. 218). Calvin tells us that the Christian can be comforted because the Devil is completely restrained by God's hand "as by a bridle". "The devil and his crew are not only fettered, but also curbed and compelled to do service" (ibid., p. 224).

We mention Marsh's distinction and Calvin's stance on the sovereignty of God because we believe that Ellul's position is identical. In discussing 2 Kings 5:1-19, Ellul (in the tradition of a theology of the Word) points out that each agent in the story acted according to his own intention and that no one of the human acts can be unequivocally identified with God's will -- but that God was able to interrelate these human acts in such a way as to work out His own will.[1]

> All the text tells us is that there is an express will of God in historical events for every people, whether it is a believing people or not. But this does not mean in the least that in some evident way historical events are a plain figure of the will of God, as, for example, in ... Bossuet's Explication de l'Histoire Universelle. We must resolutely resist any such idea, even though we may find it again today in the formulae of modern theologians: 'Historical events express a Word of God to the church,' or: 'Christ lives in history'."[2]

Against a theology of history, Ellul insists on the freedom of God and the hidden nature of God's sovereignty.[3] He believes that God's intentional will cannot be determined merely by looking at external events.[4] He argues that in the Old Testament, the prophet alone stands as the interpreter of the meaning of what God is accomplishing in what is happening.[5] "This man gives the meaning of it all, the true significance of what has happened. He brings to light the relation that exists between the free determination of man and the free decision of God."[6]

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1. The Politics of God, pp. 32-4.
2. Ibid., p. 28.
3. Ibid., p. 28.
4. Ibid., p. 153.
5. "The action of God can be grasped indirectly only by the unique one to whom God reveals and declares it himself. This unique one is the prophet. He alone knows there is an action of God there. He alone is divinely qualified to declare it" (The Politics of God, p. 21). "This man has received the revelation of God's intention ..." (ibid., p. 20). For an identical point of view see Barth, III/3, p. 24.
6. The Politics of God, p. 21.

Ellul is opposed to the deification of popular movements or trends, in which history is itself sacralized and where the inherent meaningfulness of history is confused with the God who is hidden in His sovereignty.[1] He is opposed to what he regards as a naturalized view of history, whereby the activity of the transcendent God is identified with the threal of meaning in history invented by politicized man. He sees such theology as, in fact, an ideological justification for political views already held.[2] He is critical of

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1. Ellul frankly does not think that history has some inherent meaning which can be discovered by human methods. The full and final meaning of history is seen to be God's secret. Thus he writes that apart from the meaning which the coming Kingdom gives to history, present history is nothing but an "outbreak of madness" (The Presence, p. 50). He regards human ideologies as the imposition of simplified, artificial and false meaning on a history which has no such obvious visible meaning. He writes, "The only direction there is in history is the one we attribute to the past" (A Critique, p. 31). "In other words, man's intelligence sees and creates a thread in history; the events that confirm it are the good ones, the ones worthy of being considered and retained as historical facts; the others do not make history; you can dismiss them without difficulty; they are not even worth a glance. Fundamentally all you need do is decide what history is: I call history everything that corresponds to a given evolution. ... The only trouble is that there can be three or four threads in history, each just as valid as the next" (A Critique, pp. 32-33).
   Reinhold Niebuhr was also critical of the ideological imposition of meaning on history. He wrote, "An eminent historian expresses his doubts as follows: 'Most philosophies of history ... appear to me to be grounded on an arbitrary and over-simplified selection of facts. I do not say that no clue to the ultimate significance of human action and suffering will ever be found in history. I can indeed see evidence of design, but the pattern is on a scale beyond my comprehension. (E.L.Woodward, Short Journey, p. 136)'" (Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History, p. 112). Niebuhr believed that the meaning of history is revealed at Calvary, and Calvary he understood not as an explanation of the enigmas of history, but as the basis of Christian confidence that God's suffering love is ultimately triumphant.

2. A Critique, pp. 28ff.

modern theologians who interpret eschatology in the light of history, rather than history in the light of eschatology.[1] That is, he is critical of the view which sees history as a natural revelation of God,[2] which forgets that man's history is a fallen history. In the tradition of a theology of the Word, and in the Barthian tradition of the denial of natural theology, he affirms that revelation is in history, but not of history. God is the subject of revelation, rather than revelation being the predicate of the immanent process of history. God is seen to be a free and personal Agent, not the impersonal structure of history.[3]

Ellul's attitude toward history is illustrated by the advice he gives the Church concerning the way in which she should listen to the world. He agrees that the world may have important things to say to the Church and that the Church must not be deaf to what she can learn from the world. He disagrees, however, with those in the Church who tend to uncritically endorse whatever criticism the world raises against the Church:-

> That the acceptance of condemnation could be a sign of humility, a possibility for involvement or dialogue, a test of faith willed by God, that is all well and good, but it in no way entails the proclamation that the persecutors of the Church are right![4]
> /my underline/

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1. Gabriel Vahanian et al., Katallagete, pp. 17-18. "We have to remember that, even though the Eternal has entered into history, that is not in order to eternalize history. It is the Eternal who has entered into history" (False Presence, pp. 150-1). "If God enters into History, if he reveals himself at the heart of History, it is God, not us, and neither Marx nor Hegel, who by definition gives significance and worth to this history" ("Notes en Vue d'une Ethique du Temps et du Lieu pour les Chrétiens," Foi et Vie (September-October 1960) p. 371). "God's action is a history. But that in no way leads us to magnify, glorify, hypostasize history as we see it ceaselessly in the whole movement of Protestant thought. This hypostasis in no way comes from theological truth, but from Karl Marx's influence" (ibid., p.370).

2. Ibid., pp. 270-1.

3. Emil Brunner expressed this position well (though he did not deny natural theology) when he wrote that "Jesus Christ cannot be understood from the point of view of world history, but world history is to be understood in the light of Jesus Christ" (Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, trans. by Olive Wyon (1952), p. 237).

4. False Presence, p. 34.

A theology of history could deify the words offered by the world, because the world is seen to be the self-evolution of God. A theology of the Word cannot do so because Satan is seen to have an influence in world history. For a theology of the Word, human words (in this case non-Christian ones) may become the instruments of God's Word, but this involves a careful listening to see whether the words are merely human or whether God is personally addressing the Church through them. In Ellul's terms, the world absolutely cannot "write the Church's agenda"; however, the world can counsel the Church, if this counsel is relativized by being heard in the context of the Church's effort to be radically obedient to God. What the Church must hear is what God is saying, not simply what the world is saying. There is a broken or dialectical relationship between all human words and actions and the Word of God.

It would be a severe mistake to think that Ellul's position on the sovereignty of Christ is merely a disagreement with much modern theology at the theoretical level. The difference has to do with ethical practice as well. His position consistently relates to his understanding of the Christian life. If the Christian understands himself and his world as radically sinful (Chapter One), and if he knows that the only life pleasing to God is one lived in conscious obedience to God's will (Chapters Two and Three) — then a theology of history (as we have outlined it) leads to a distortion of the Christian life. It minimizes the sinfulness of the world, which in turn leads to a blurring of the difference between the Church and the world.[1] When the difference between the Church and

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1. Ellul says that the Bible expressly teaches that there must not be a confusion between the Church and the world (John 15:19). (Protestantisme Français, p. 142).

the world is minimized, Christians are then free to conform to the world. The world is sacralized, because Christians minimize the world's sinfulness; the Church is secularized, because the transcendent will of God is identified with norms derived from the world.

Ellul explicitly warns that confidence in Christ's sovereignty over the world must not be used as an excuse for not consciously seeking to be obedient to God's will.[1] He says that to reason that because "God can use anything, I can do anything" is to treat God with contempt.[2] While agreeing with Cullmann and Barth that Christ is the Lord of both the Church and the world, Ellul correctly[3] recognizes that an important distinction between the Church and the world is involved.[4] Secular Christians distort the meaning of

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1. The Politics of God, pp. 70-71. While not affirming a psychological legalism as to the precise nature of the conversion process, Ellul, as contrasted with secular Christians, emphasizes the conscious decisional nature of Christian faith. He writes, "One does not share implicitly in this new order, which is that of Jesus Christ, simply by acting like everyone else in the performance of one's professional or political duties. One shares in it by the acknowledgment with the mouth and heart that Jesus Christ is Lord.
   The tendency today is excessively to minimize the importance of the faith. With many of our intellectuals one gets the impression that since Jesus Christ is Lord, therefore all men, whatever their religion or intention, share in that order and their works are within the lordship of Jesus Christ. But the scriptures, on the contrary, insist on the fact that the acceptance of this new order is deliberate and intentional. Otherwise we are on the way to reviving the medieval heresy of 'implicit faith'!" (False Presence, p. 22).

2. The Politics of God, p. 71.

3. By "correctly" we mean that Ellul is both biblically correct and also correct in his interpretation of Barth and Cullmann's thought. It is interesting to note that throughout False Presence of the Kingdom, he criticizes not Barth, but the secular Christians who have distorted Barth's dialectical thought (which Ellul regards as thoroughly biblical) (ibid., pp. 9,15-16, 80-1). He can even refer to himself as a "Barthian", (Mirror", p. 202) though he surely does not mean this in a doctrinaire sense.

4. To Will and to Do, p. 103; see also Protestantisme Français, pp. 159-160. Ellul thinks that one of the most prevalent Christian heresies of our time is the failure to emphasize the distinction between the Church/...

Christ's lordship over the Church when they forget that the dynamic of the Christian life is different from that of the non-Christian life, when they forget that God demands that Christians seek to be obedient to the future Kingdom:-

> The situation of the man to whom the Word of God has not been explicitly declared, but whose decisions are also taken up by God, is completely different from that of the man who has received this knowledge, for the latter has no right to avoid an express attempt to fulfil the commandment.[1]

"Once the Word of God has been addressed to me ... it must be my foundation on which I try to find out what can fulfil it and accomplish it among my acts and decisions."[2]

Ellul criticizes those who interpret the sovereignty of Christ as though this meant the elimination of sin and thus the endorsement of all human projects.[3] He cannot accept the idea that freedom

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Church and the world, the affirmation of Christ's lordship over the world without an equally strong emphasis on Christ as Saviour (False Presence, p. 105). In spite of the high Christology implicit in talk of Christ's lordship over the world, to minimize His role as Saviour is to turn Christianity into a mere humanism — for the norms and content of the Christian life are determined by the world.

1. The Politics of God, pp. 71-2.

2. Ibid., p. 71.

3. Ellul says that secular Christians believe that "Through the obedience of the Son, God has rendered disobedience impossible" (False Presence, p. 15). He accuses secular theology of being a theology of glory, whereby realized eschatology is applied to the whole of history, as though Christ's resurrection re-directed history, eliminated sin, and made world history synonomous with the future Kingdom of God (ibid., pp. 17-18). He sees the basis of this error in what he regards as an unbiblical doctrine of man, going back to Roman Catholicism. He writes, "Since the lordship of Jesus Christ is contemporary, since the Kingdom of God is present, all the works of natural man, of non-Christian man, are inscribed in this merciful plan of God, and hence they come into conformity with what he expects of us. On the individual level, after a harsh criticism and rejection of the idea of original sin, one is reduced to saying that man is merely fallible, which comes to the same thing in the end as the Catholic proposition.
If one is led into this twofold error, it is for the same reasons which progressively motivated the Catholic theologians. 'We have to manage to live in this world. We must legitimize what is done by man. ... We must reinstate a 'possibility' for natural — or pagan man. Only in terms of that possibility can one take any action in politics, science or the economy '" (ibid., pp. 18-19).

means obeying human necessity[1] because he believes that true freedom is eschatological existence, life lived over-against the sinful patterns of the world, life lived in and from grace. He believes that it is a blatant theological error to think that Christ's lordship means that sin is eliminated and thus that Christians can endorse the ways of the world.[2] "The fact that Jesus Christ is truly the Lord of the world in no way guarantees that the works performed by man in this world are expressions of that lordship..."[3] By recognizing the reality of sin and also God's ability to creatively accomplish His purposes in the midst of sin, Ellul encourages Christians to strive to lead lives freed from the sinful ways of the world, while at the same time encouraging them to trust in God's hidden wisdom.[4]

It is no doubt true that Ellul, like the New Testament, uses the language of dualism, insisting that Satan is to a large extent the ruler of this world.[5] However, he, like the New Testament,

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1. A Critique, pp.171ff.

2. False Presence, pp. 13-16.

3. Ibid., p. 16. "Many hold the conviction that since the world's man-made morality is also within the realm over which Jesus Christ is Lord it is by that fact legitimized. But it is forgotten that that Lordship is affirmed over a world in revolt, whence the rebel forces have not been eliminated. The fact of the lordship of Christ in no way justifies all the world's projects. It means only that (a) those forces are potentially overcome; (b) whatever man's enterprises may be, they will all come finally before God to be judged; and (c) the end of history is determined, known, and inevitable. It is the reintegration of the whole in Christ" (To Will and To Do, pp. 102-3).

4. False Presence, p. 22.

5. Ellul can speak of the will of the world as a will toward death or suicide (The Presence, pp. 8, 28, 58, 116). "Living in the world we are living in the domain of the Prince of this world, of Satan, and all around us we constantly see the actions of this Prince..." (ibid., p. 16). On one occasion he even refers to the Devil as the creator of our modern civilization. "Thus, because our civilization is more than human, we must perceive that it is not made by 'flesh and blood' but by the 'principalities ... and ... powers ... the world-rulers of this darkness ...' (Eph. 6:12)" (The Presence, p. 124). If the last quote sounds like/...

understands this dualism to be relative; Satan's activity is seen as ultimately subordinate to God's purposes.[1] Ellul cannot legitimately be accused of offering a total dualism nor of denying the sovereignty of Christ over the world. What he has done is to insist that Christ's sovereignty over the world is a hidden reality, which does not imply the affirmation of an optimistic world view.

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like an all-out dualism, one must remember that he can elsewhere write that even the modern domination of the world by technique would not be possible were it not for God's permission (The Politics of God, p. 174).

1. Protestantisme Français, p. 159. "The world is in God's hands, and even Satan serves his designs" (ibid., p. 144). "God saves in such a way that the prince of this world is subordinate to the salvation of man by the victory of the Savior who became Lord" ("Problèmes de Civilisation", p. 680).

Karl Barth, even more than Ellul, stressed the belief that evil is ultimately subordinate to Jesus Christ (Barth, III/3, pp. 157-8, 289). He said that evil is forced against itself to serve Christ (Barth III/3, p. 367). "The world-governance of God extends even to the sphere of sin, yet not in such a way as to make God the author of it" (Barth, III/3, p. 163). Characteristically he wrote, "whatever evil is, God is its lord. We must not push our attempt to take evil seriously to the point of ever coming to think of it as an original and indeed creative counter-deity ..." (Barth, IV/1, p. 408). Ellul would surely agree with Barth in his insistence that evil should be rated as high as possible in relation to man, but as low as possible in relation to God (Barth III/3, p. 295). "There is the danger either of an uneasy, bleak and skeptical overestimation of its [evil's] power in relation to God, or of an easy, comfortable and dogmatic underestimation of its power in relation to us" (Barth III/3, p. 293). "In its relation to God chaos is always an absolutely subordinate factor, but it is always absolutely superior in its relation to the creature" (Barth, III/3, p. 76).

Bonhoeffer's position is similar to Ellul's and Barth's at this point. He wrote, "Christ and His adversary, the devil, are mutually exclusive contraries; yet the devil must serve Christ even against his will; he desires evil, but over and over again he is compelled to do good; so that the realm or space of the devil is always beneath the feet of Jesus Christ" (Bonhoeffer, Ethics, p. 70).

The position of Ellul, Barth and Bonhoeffer is similar to Calvin's thought, which we discussed earlier (see above, p. 212).

He rightly believes that when the Bible talks about God's sovereignty, it does not forget what it has already said about man's sinfulness. Likewise, he resolves to keep the reality of sin closely in view when he discusses Christ's lordship. As a Christian in the Calvinistic tradition (stressing the radical fallenness of man) and as a sociologist in the realistic tradition, Ellul writes, "We must dare to take human history as it is without changing its substance or interpreting it as we fancy or throwing a Christian mantle over the concrete facts."[1] He points out that it is easy to make an abstract affirmation that Christ is the Lord of the world; what is difficult is to make this confession in the face of the actual reality of the world.[2] "To say that God is the Lord when Sennacherib is about to enslave you and put out your eyes is to say something of real significance."[3] Ellul helps the Church to recover a realistic belief in the sovereignty of God, which sees the evil and tragic character of human history — while still believing that God can use the wrath of men to accomplish His will.[4]

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1. The Politics of God, p. 182.
2. Ibid., p. 170.
3. Ibid., pp. 169-170.
4. Not only does Ellul criticize Teilhard de Chardin for minimizing man's sinfulness, but also for undercutting the importance of direct responsibility to the transcendent Lord. He believes that Teilhard's thought can lead Christians to abandon their liberty acquired in Jesus Christ. Speaking of Teilhard's thought, he writes, "It is one of the most dangerous anti-Christian enterprises of our day for its pseudo-demonstration of the accomplishments of the cosmic (?) Christ, by a kind of necessity intrinsic to nature, by its causing the Incarnation to disappear, and by its confusion between freedom and historical necessity" ("Le Sens de la Liberté," pp. 17-18). Teilhard's thinking runs counter to Ellul's belief that Christ grants freedom from fatality (L'Homme Mesure, p. 21). Ellul criticizes both Teilhard and Marx because he thinks they encourage man to rely on automatic mechanisms for solving his problems, rather than encouraging him to assume personal responsibility. He thinks that Teilhard's thought is both based on conformity to popular worldly trends and also encourages conformity to the same (False Presence, p. 55). Having stated that the world is trying to/...

to assimilate the person and thus exclude God, he says of Teilhard: "It is the scandal and the appalling heresy of Teilhard de Chardin to pretend to bless this totalism of the world in the name of Christianity; but that cannot be done, as is evident from his writings, without leaving to one side the incarnation of Christ in the person of Jesus, that is, by ultimately depersonalizing God, and by turning Christ into a point, into a complete geometric abstraction" (False Presence, pp. 208-9). He says that in Teilhard's evoluticnism, "technology, socialism and science play the role of factors which permit humanity to pass from the Noosphere to fusion Point Omega -- just as, by simple evolution, matter passed into life and the animal into man. To the same order of systems belongs Marxism, which (at least in its most widespread interpretation) declares that the play of dialectical materialism in history will necessarily solve all contradictions, hence, all problems. These systems seem to me dangerous, because they demand of man a sort of renunciation of autonomous action. But this adaptation of man to the system is precisely the greatest danger inherent in a technological bureaucratic society" ("Between Chaos and Paralysis," p. 748; see also False Presence, p. 20). Speaking of the inevitability of history's course, he says, "Whether in the Marxian or Teilhardian sense, the important thing was that people be assured that 'things take care of themselves' and that there is a happy ending to all experience; that secret mechanisms will produce solutions, without effort, energy, morality, or civic virtue. The model is not: 'I do'. It is: 'Things develop.' This means that something outside of man is relied on to make the social and political machinery function, regardless of the particular nature of man. To be sure, this provides much greater security -- if people truly 'believe' in these mechanisms -- and allow us to 'reason' without taking account of the uncertain human factor" (The Political Illusion, p. 225). Rather interestingly, Ellul includes Teilhard in the same category as The Reader's Digest, public relations men, and personality tests. (One might add Norman Vincent Peale to the list). He believes that these all encourage man to take a "positive attitude" toward life, assuring him that everything will work out well; man need have no responsible concerns about the future (A Critique, p. 250).

Ellul also thinks that the kind of idealism encouraged by Teilhard leads Christians to have an easy conscience as long as they participate in the world (which is implicitly Christian). Thus he believes that Teilhard's thought encourages the sponsorship of violence by Christians who are utterly unaware of the actual reality of violence (Violence, pp. 123-5).

Teilhard de Chardin is the one man who clearly represents many of the things Ellul opposes and against whom he is in conscious rebellion (The Political Illusion, pp. 214, 237).

Ellul's disagreements with Teilhard in many ways parallel Kierkegaard's polemics against Hegel. Kierkegaard criticized Hegel for regarding the world as an inevitable development, which Kierkegaard thought led logically to the denial of personal responsibility (Kierkegaard, The Lost Years, p. 77; Gregor Malantschuk, Kierkegaard's Thought, pp. 61-2). Ellul, while not an existentialist (was Kierkegaard either?), agrees with the existentialist emphasis on the importance of individual responsibility and the freedom to rebel against patterns of worldly conformity.

James M. Gustafson may be right that no social ethicist truly believes that what God is doing can be determined by a glance at a mere/...

A Biblical Evaluation

As we have seen, Ellul rejects an understanding of God's sovereignty which sees God as the structure of history or which thinks that the structure of history has been changed as a result of Christ's resurrection.[1] We have also seen that he thinks that the Christian belief in God's lordship is not to be confused with political ideologies.[2] There is good biblical support for these contentions.

Walther Eichrodt indicates that the Old Testament understands creation as "the free institution of a spiritual and personal will." "Creation does not draw the deity into the flux of world-process, but sets him over against it in complete independence."[3] He argues that the Old Testament rejects dualism (the assertion of a second god as the world's creator and lord).[4] He also states that the

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mere chronicle of what is happening. Indeed, as Gustafson rightly asserts, moral action is impossible unless some distance is recognized between what is and what ought to be. Otherwise, a fatalism is encouraged. He rightly perceives that in practice some judgment is made as to what action fulfils God's purposes and what doesn't (James M. Gustafson, Christian Ethics, p. 132).

Though Gustafson's reasoning might seem to reduce Ellul's argument that men like Teilhard encourage conformity to the world, in actuality it does not do so, for Ellul is critical precisely of the use of human ideology to determine what God is doing. He sees reliance on human ideology (in this case the popular ideology of the political left) to interpret the meaning of God's action as necessarily the expression of conformity to worldly trends.

1. Violence, p. 25.

2. A Critique, pp. 28, 66.

3. Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. II, p. 98.

4. Ibid., p. 99.

Old Testament rejects pantheism, "which identifies God and the world, and makes the deity an impersonal force, pulsing everywhere, yet everywhere eluding Man's grasp. Hence in Israel the assertion that God created the world acquires a new meaning not to be found elsewhere: creation is the free institution of a will which contains its own norms."[1] Eichrodt's analysis certainly confirms Ellul's insistence that God's sovereignty must be thought of as the free activity of a personal Agent.

Walther Zimmerli has persuasively argued that the Old Testament does not believe that God's purposes can be perceived merely by a study of external history. What Zimmerli says about the role of the prophet is in keeping with what we have described as a dialectical understanding of history, a theology of the Word. He recognizes that the form-critical examination of the prophets' speeches indicates that the prophets' task was the historical declaration of what was about to occur.[2] However, he then writes:-

> We must not ... think that the prophets were simply interpreters of history, who kept their ears open to the historical situation, and adduced their message from it, and from the understanding which they had gained by reflecting upon it. History itself did not give the prophets their commission. It is their secret that, in spite of their close relationship to contemporary history, they were conscious of being the ambassadors of the God who stood above this history and who controlled it. ... Behind the word of the prophet was not the river of history, rushing with invincible force, and by its rigid laws forcing its way on and breaking down all opposition. Behind their preaching stood the Lord of freedom, in whose hands all history remains a tool which can be wielded freely by him.[3]

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1. Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. II, p. 99.
2. Zimmerli, The Law and the Prophets, pp. 65-6.
3. Ibid., p. 66; for an identical point of view see Barth, III/3, p. 24; see also Kornelis H. Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, pp. 193-4, 276.

Turning to the New Testament, we note that Clinton D. Morrison argues that the New Testament does not see Christ's resurrection as involving a defeat and a re-commissioning of demonic powers in terms of public history.[1] "Rome was no different the week after the resurrection from what it was the week before it."[2] Similarly Ernst Käsemann defends the relative dualism of the New Testament, against a simplistic monism. He points out that the apostle Paul (see Rom. 5:12ff) did not understand history as a continuous evolutionary process, but as the conflict between Adam and Christ[3]:-

> Paul's view of salvation history does not differ from Augustine's. Salvation history is the battle field of the civitas dei and the civitas terrena. ... Measured from human criteria, salvation is fundamentally rooted in disaster. That means that the Pauline proclamation of the reality of salvation history is deeply paradoxical.[4]
>
> For there is no Christ without antichrist; there are no apostles without Judas, no prophets without enthusiasts, no fields ripening to harvest without weeds; and the letters of the Apocalypse have to tell the churches at all times what their Lord has against them.[5]

As we have just seen, biblical support can be given for Ellul's theology of the Word. There seems to be one place where his thought can be criticized. We will raise this criticism by setting his thought in conversation with Barth's and Calvin's.

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1. Morrison, The Powers That Be, p. 45.
2. Ibid., p. 115.
3. Ernst Käsemann, Perspectives on Paul (1971), p. 67. Similarly C.K.Barrett says that any conception of Heilsgeschichte which imagines that history can be "represented on squared paper with the aid of coordinate axes" is biblically dubious (C.K.Barrett, From First Adam to Last, p. 4). Of course, Ellul's salvation history approach is not of this variety!
4. Käsemann, Perspectives, pp. 67-8.
5. Ibid., p. 69.

Barth's thinking serves as an important corrective to Ellul's at one point. Barth seeks to relate the activities of God as Creator and lord closely to His activities as Redeemer. While agreeing that God's will cannot be determined directly from external factors, he insists that there is not complete discontinuity; what God demands of a man has some relationship to the external factors in which God the Creator and Lord has allowed a man's life to be placed.[1] He writes, "The man who lives by his faith may know that in everything which may happen to him he has to do with God."[2] Barth is very careful to state that the external factors of a man's life do not determine conduct. Obedience is always direct obedience to God.[3] Nevertheless, these external factors are not to be understood as necessarily harmful.[4] Barth believes that to hear God's voice we must listen both to what God is saying to us through the external factors as well as to what He is saying which may contradict these factors. His assumption is that God is the Lord of both the outer and the inner world.[5] Having said all this, he is still very much in the tradition of a theology of the Word. He entirely rejects the idea that God's will can be perceived from simply looking at external history:-

> The situations and opportunities and possibilities and impossibilities of the world-process with which he is called upon to wrestle do not as such contain within themselves or proclaim any divine and infallible word. ... It is only the Holy Spirit who can command him, giving the orders and prohibitions which he must and can obey. It is only the Holy Spirit who can really guide him.[6]

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1. Barth, III/4, pp.595-6.
2. Barth, III/3, p. 18.
3. Barth, III/4, pp.620-2, 628.
4. Barth, III/4, p. 622.
5. Barth, III/4, p. 636.
6. Barth, III/3, p. 258; see also pp. 19-20.

Though Ellul draws personal comfort from his belief in the sovereignty of Christ ("Mirror", p. 203), it is nevertheless the case that his thought on the subject occurs in the polemical context of a rebellion against those who confuse Christ's sovereignty with a "positive thinking" ideology. He rightly does battle against those who minimize man's sinfulness when they talk of God's sovereignty. Barth, however, while agreeing with the truth of Ellul's point, goes on to remind us that God can do positive things in public or external history. If God's positive actions in public history are not self-evident, neither are they negligible. Thus the Christian mood need not be one-sidedly critical (Ellul rightly knows it has to be that because God's sovereignty is over a rebellious world), but can also be that of gratitude for all that God does even in external history. (Ellul may have a slight awareness of this latter point when he recognizes that Christians can sometimes agree with non-Christians at the level of concrete action. Still, this recognition does not come to the fore in his discussion of Christ's sovereignty). According to Barth, when man seeks God's will, he has to pay careful attention to these external factors. True, these are no more than instructional preparation for the event of hearing God's Word; nevertheless, they provide important instructional preparation, without which God's Word becomes an abstraction. Ellul, of course, recognizes the importance of situational analysis; it's just that his thought concerning God's sovereignty is governed one-sidedly by the importance of rebelling against the sinful ways of the world. His point, while a needed one, must not dull the positive truth that in spite of man's sinfulness, God is able to do constructive things in outward history, things to which the man of faith must pay careful attention, things to which one has cause to be grateful.

(Ellul's tendency is to see only the tragic side of life. He is a Frenchman and the tragic sense of life embodied in French existentialism is in his veins, no matter how much he criticizes existentialist writers.)[1]

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1. In the light of the general similarity between Ellul's and Barth's understanding of God's sovereignty, we need to give a brief statement concerning Barth's basic viewpoint. Like Ellul, he points out that the meaning of what God was doing in Old Testament history was not obvious. The prophet was necessary as the interpreter of the meaning of God's activity (Barth, III/3, p. 24). Like Ellul, Barth also sees the belief in providence as a genuine article of faith, no less difficult to grasp than other Christian beliefs. He is quite aware that external history cannot prove that Christ is lord (Barth, III/3, pp. 15, 160). He also agrees that the belief in providence is strictly a belief in God, and hence one must begin not with a study of world history, but with faith that in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ God was able to accomplish His purposes in spite of man's sin (Barth, III/3, pp. 54-5). He believes that it is only on the basis of "special" revelation that one can come to trust in God's general benificence (Barth, III/3, pp. 43-4, 140-2, 185). He thinks that a vague belief in providence has nothing to do with Christian belief. In the absence of faith in the Christo-centric sense, the idea of providence can be challenged by the tragedies of history or can lead to the endorsement of immanent demons ("providence" being one of Hitler's favourite words) (Barth, III/3, p. 33). Ellul is also insistent that Christology must be at the fore for any belief in providence to be Christian (Protestantisme Français, p. 159).

   While admitting that man is never intended to see the whole of history from the divine perspective, while recognizing that much remains hidden, Barth insists that the believer may continually see something of the meaning of God's providential activity in concrete events. Specifically, he thinks that the disclosure of the meaning of God's providential activity is related to the practical insights necessary and helpful to Christians at specific points (Barth, III/3, pp. 23-4). Barth and Ellul believe that the meaning of the lordship of Christ is generally hidden; however, as we have just argued, Ellul does not say what Barth does about the revelation of the positive meaning of what God is doing in history. Ellul's recognition that the prophets were enabled to see God's purposes, leads him to believe that an awareness of God's providential purposes is also possible for Christians today. However, he almost always interprets this in a critical sense, calling Christians to be "sentinels" who sound warnings. One might say that he, like Barth, recognizes that through revelation the meaning of God's activity can be revealed. The problem is that Ellul only talks of this in terms of the establishment of a critical stance.

   Barth in his later thought came to have a positive and constructive attitude toward the world, while still being critical of the world to the degree that the demonic seems to be exerting its influence. Barth rejected the abstract dualism of his early thought/...

Barth is really of one mind with Calvin at this point. As we have seen, Calvin was well aware that there are other intentions active in public history than God's. Nevertheless, he believed that man's response to world events should never be merely negative, because the sovereign and benevolent Lord is working his purposes out in history:-

> If Joseph had stopped to dwell upon his brothers' treachery, he would never have been able to show a brotherly attitude toward them. But since he turned his thoughts to the Lord, forgetting the injustice, he inclined to gentleness and kindness, even to the point of comforting his brothers and saying: 'It is not you who sold me into Egypt, but I was sent before you by God's will, that I might save your life.' (Gen. 45:5,7-8) 'Indeed you intended evil against me, but the Lord turned it into good' (Gen. 50:20). [1]

Were Calvin living today, he might indeed share Ellul's concern about the technological bondage of modern life and the demonic intention active in this realm. It seems unlikely, however, that he would so casually brush aside the positive benefits of modern developments.[2]

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thought (see Barth, III/3, pp. 158, 292ff., 367; IV/1, pp. 408-9; IV/3, First Half, p. 168). He said, "Christ is known as Lord only in the Church, so only Christians know what it means to be obedient to Him. But the same Christ also governs without the Church. That is what Paul means in Colossians 1, when he says that Christ is above all. This is the presupposition for Christian action in the civic community: that Christ is there also" (Barth, Table Talk, p. 79; see also III/3, p. 256) (Ellul does not use this kind of a theological rationale and certainly does not use it to encourage social involvement). In answer to the question, "Is God's Lordship over the state limited?" Barth answered, "No, it is not limited, only hidden. We are awaiting the revelation of God's Lordship. It is hidden not only in the state, but also in the Church!" (Barth, Table Talk, p. 83). He also came to see that ultimate hope does not invalidate the significance and possibility of penultimate hopes for the improvement of society, as long as these penultimate hopes do not take the place of ultimate hope and as long as they are not linked with a utopian view of history (Barth, IV/3, Second Half, pp. 936-938) (Ellul seems to say little about genuine Christian hopes of a penultimate nature).

1. John Calvin, Institutes, Vol. I, p. 220.

2. H. Richard Niebuhr was in the Calvinist tradition of emphasizing God's sovereignty over the world. He understood responsibility as man's response to the activity of the One God active in the many actions upon us (H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 170). "Responsibility affirms: 'God is acting in all actions upon you/...

you. So respond to all actions upon you as to respond to his action" (H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, p. 126). He cited the story of Joseph, as did Calvin, to make his point. Like Calvin, he spoke of the activity of God in terms of a divine intention present amid various human intentions (H. Richard Niebuhr, The Responsible Self, pp. 168-9) (Niebuhr interestingly does not refer to a demonic intention and this may be significant, as we will note). Referring to the Joseph story he writes, "Here the clear distinction is between the particular intentions that guide a finite action and the divine intention that uses or lies behind such actions. So Joseph can and does forgive, responding to the infinite in his reaction to the finite" (ibid., p. 169). Niebuhr wrote of the Assyrian invasion described in the tenth chapter of Isaiah, "The destructive intentions of Assyria are one thing; the holy, saving intentions of God are another. The meet, the fitting response of Israel, must be to the infinite intention in the first place, to the finite intention only secondarily. That means that the first response, the fitting action in the critical hour, is to be internal reformation; defense against Assyria is the secondary thing" (ibid., p. 169).

Niebuhr spoke of the sovereignty of God as God's creative involvement in history; however, unlike Calvin, he did not use the language of predestination (ibid., p. 165). "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the loving dynamic One, who does new things, whose relation to this world is more like that of father to his children than like that of the maker to his manufactures; it is more like that of the ruler to his realm than like that of the designer to his machines" (ibid., p. 173).

The weakness of Niebuhr's position is that, unlike Calvin (and Ellul), he did not do justice to the relative dualism of the New Testament when he referred to God's sovereignty. (We recognize that in other contexts he did speak of man's sinfulness). He says, "If then we try to summarize the ethos of Jesus in a formula we may do so by saying that he interprets all actions upon him as signs of the divine action of creation, government, and salvation and so responds to them as to respond to divine action" (ibid., p. 167). Would not a more accurate reading of the New Testament force one to admit that Jesus' "ethos" was also based on a response of opposition to the forces of evil? It comes as no surprise that once Niebuhr has minimized the role of evil in the world, he can go on to tell us that Christians should feel at home in the world (ibid., p. 177) (How consistent is this advice with the New Testament conviction that Christians are "pilgrims and strangers"?). Nor does it surprise one that having minimized the role of evil, Niebuhr all too quickly accepts emerging trends as representing the will of God. (For example, in The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), he develops a doctrine of the ministry in close relationship to emerging trends in the United States). The danger in Niebuhr's position is that evil is minimized, all of which nicely conforms to American optimism! (see John D. Godsey, The Promise of H. Richard Niebuhr, p. 100). (Part of Niebuhr's problem may be traced to the influence of Augustine's "Neo-Platonism", the confusion in which trust in God and trust in Being become synonymous: see H. Richard Niebuhr, Radical Monotheism and Western Culture (1960), pp. 32-34, 37-38, 47).

If/...

Christ's Absolute Sovereignty and Freedom

In our discussion so far we have shown indirectly that Ellul does believe in the absolute sovereignty and freedom of Christ in relationship to the world. Here we will seek to further establish this point by more detailed documentation. That Ellul believes in the absolute (though hidden) lordship of Christ over the world is indicated when he writes that "God is the God of all peoples. He reigns over all kings. He directs world politics."[1]

More conclusive than Ellul's abstract statements affirming God's sovereignty are his personal references to the same. He qualifies the possibility of completing his writings on theological ethics with the words "if God permits"[2] and qualifies the possibility of finishing his next volume on ethics with the words "God willing!"[3] He draws personal comfort from his belief that Christ is the Lord of the world. He writes,

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If H. Richard Niebuhr seems to minimize the sinfulness of the world when he talks of God's sovereignty, Paul Lehmann goes even further. When Lehmann refers to what is going on in the world, he sounds Hegelian — as though everything which occurs is the expression of God's will — as though Satan had gone into retirement (Paul Lehmann, Ethics in a Christian Context, p. 82).

1. The Politics of God, p. 11; see also p. 127; Violence, p.25. "Everything man does is within the global plan of God" (The Politics of God, p. 69). "Nothing escapes his power, either in heaven or on earth" (Protestantisme Français, p. 159). "No matter what may be the Assyrian's power, there is one who encloses him unceasingly, who knows him unceasingly, who both chooses and rejects him, who is both much more profound than he and also radically different. ... All the power that modern man has gained can manifest itself in the long run only in the fact that God will use this very power against the man who hopes to dethrone God " (The Politics of God, p. 177). "Modern man can say that God is dead, but this does not affect either God or his purpose nor does it allow modern man any effective autonomy" (ibid., p. 177). Ellul even argues that God can use nature to accomplish His specific purposes (Jonah, p. 25).

2. "Mirror," p. 201.

3. Letter, May 24,1971.

> Now we are in a period of dilution, of watering down the expression as well as the content of Revelation. I personally find myself caught in this crisis, facing it honestly and knowing that God is faithful and will not abandon us even when human folly becomes frenetic.[1]
>
> I face the crisis -- including the theological crisis -- for what it is, in the assurance that on the other side of such crisis the truth of the Gospel is at last proclaimed in truth.[2]

In his discussion of Christ's sovereignty, Ellul emphasizes Christ's absolute freedom[3], a freedom which does not have to bend before the bar of human judgment. He admits that the presence of suffering in the world tempts one to become bitter and to blame the all-powerful and free God.[4] He does not think there is a theoretical answer to this problem. "God does not explain his conduct and decision to man when the latter demands an account, just as God does not justify himself before man."[5] The answer to man's questions about theodicy comes when man, like Job, realizes that he is in no position to pass judgment on God, that God does not have to give a theoretical reply to man's question. God's reply is His personal revelation, whereby the questioner becomes the one questioned, and is thus led to realize that he is in no position to argue with his Creator. God's answer to man's questions about the ways of God's freedom is the gift of faith, the establishment of a relationship with God whereby man is led to trust in God in spite of the inexplicable nature of the world.[6]

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1. "Mirror," p. 203.
2. Ibid., p. 203.
3. The Politics of God, pp. 57, 63.
4. Ibid., p. 59.
5. Ibid., p. 59.
6. Ibid., pp. 59-60. "There is no theology of expiation, of testing, or of the presence of Satan. All the hypotheses suggested and discarded by Job and his friends are discourses to which no answer is given. God does not choose to set his stamp on any of/...

> The problem is not a metaphysical problem. The existence of evil, its cause, God's attitude to it, the relation of God's omnipotence to it — these are all matters for an irrelevant metaphysical dissertation. To have knowledge of such things changes nothing whatsoever in our life and suffering. The doctrine of evil and its origin may satisfy our curiosity but it is unimportant. God is not an encyclopedia whose task is to satisfy our curiosity. The true question is that of man's attitude in the situation of suffering and the grip of evil.[1]

Ellul may have said here the one truly important thing which needs to be said concerning the problem of theodicy. It seems to be true that man's attitude toward God is not a function of external circumstances. This explains why a toothache can lead some people to deny God, whereas lifelong physical misery can lead others to an ever deepening relationship with God. If man's relationship with God is the key to the issue, rather than some philosophical argument about suffering, then the Christian answer to the problem of theodicy can only be an invitation to enter into relationship with the God who is beyond all human questioning. "An appeal is simply made to the changing of man in the presence of God's promise. You are in despair in a hopeless situation. God's Word is addressed to you."[2]

It is important to note that Ellul is not giving a Christian existentialist answer. He is not saying that God has only to do with man's inner life and hence the issue of His sovereignty over the world is to be dropped. Ellul genuinely

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> of them. He reveals only one thing to Job, namely, that he is the free God, the unrestricted God, the God who gives account to no one. But he is also the God who speaks to this man and who is thus with this man. This is enough to demolish all objections, accusations, theogonies, revolts and dramas. 'I have uttered what I did not understand' (Job 42:3). This is all that man can ultimately say when confronted by the revealed freedom of God" (The Politics of God, pp. 59-60).

1. Ibid., p. 60.
2. Ibid., pp.60-1.

believes that God is the Lord of world history. What he is saying is that God's ways are in many respects unsearchable (Rom. 11:33); faith trusts in God as the all-wise Lord of the world, though faith is not sight. Though man has no theoretical solution to the problem of theodicy, the encounter with God leads not to thinking that God is imprisoned in the inner realm, but to a trust in God's hidden wisdom which is beyond man's comprehension, but which relates to the whole world.

In Ellul's emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God, His freedom, and the problem of theodicy as a problem of faith — he is on sound biblical ground. Bultmann cites some of Jesus' sayings which imply a childlike belief in providence (Lk. 12:22-31 or Mtt. 6:25-32; Mtt. 10:29-31 or Lk. 12:6-7; Mtt. 5:45).[1] He writes of Jesus' attitude toward theodicy:-

> That suffering gives reason for doubt of the power of God, Jesus did not believe. This would have been irreconcilable with his idea of God, for the doubt presupposes that man in himself has a claim upon God and possesses a criterion by which to judge what is fitting for God and what is not. In the thought of Jesus the only doubt which has significance is the doubt which refers to man himself and shakes his natural security, the doubt which makes clear to man that he stands in the last hour, in the crisis of decision,[2]

Gerhard von Rad states that Job's argument against his friends was an argument for the

> incomparable freedom of this absolute Jahweh, whose deeds are uncontrollable by any human reason. A special part of it is the divine freedom to root justice where he pleases. It is not as if God were bound to some norm of right, so that there was, as it were, an umpire who, in the case of a dispute between God and man, could engage both to observe the rule (Job IX.32f.). Jahweh is so free and powerful that he himself determines what is right, and is always in the right against man. This is the root point of Job's supreme trial.[3]

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1. Rudolph Bultmann, Jesus and the Word, pp. 160-161.
2. Ibid., pp. 170-1.
3. Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. I, pp. 412-413.

Also von Rad points out that God's answer to Job is completely different from the answer Job had expected from the question asked:-

> Initially his answer consists in a storm of counter-questions, all of which point to the ludicrous limits set to human penetration. In answering Job's question God lifts the veil a little, just so far that Job may see how many more and ... greater riddles lie behind it.[1]
>
> If Job's holding fast to his righteousness was a question put to God, God gives the answer by pointing to the glory of his providence that sustains all his creation. Of course this justice of God cannot be comprehended by man: it can only be adored.[2]

The Freedom of God and the Independence of Natural Man

We have refrained from titling this section "The Freedom of God and the Freedom of Man" because as we saw in Chapter Two, Ellul regards independence or autonomy as bondage to sin and not as true freedom.[3] We are, nevertheless, concerned here with the way in which he understands God's free lordship over the world to be related to natural man's independent action or natural man's freedom of movement. For the

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1. Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, Vol. I, p. 416.

2. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 417; for a related discussion see Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, translated by G.T. Thomson (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1950), pp. 93-97. Ellul's position on the hidden though absolute nature of God's sovereignty is in line with the early Barth's emphasis on the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and man. Barth wrote, "Again we ask the question, 'Is God unrighteous?' and again we answer, 'No'. Since we cannot measure His action by our behaviour or by our expectations, we must abide humbly by the recognition that His procedure is altogether beyond our powers of observation" (Barth, Romans, p. 351). "'Nay, but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God?' [Rom. 9:20.] All that must be said about the objection is comprehended in the words — O man. The objector overlooks the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. ... He speaks as though they were God's partners, junior partners perhaps, but nevertheless competent to conduct an argument with Him" (Barth, Romans, p. 355).
   Barth in his later thought continued to stress the absolute sovereignty of God (III/3, p. 13).

3. The Politics of God, p. 16.

sake of simplicity we will use here the word "freedom" in the way it is commonly used, being synonymous with independence or autonomy. We must remember that we are not discussing what Ellul believes to be true freedom or Christian freedom (from sin through grace).

As we might expect Ellul does not intend to offer a theoretical solution to the traditional problem of the relationship between God's omnipotence and natural man's freedom. He flatly asserts that man cannot fathom the mysteries of God's will; God is transcendent and thus His ways are above the reach of man's intellectual comprehension.[1] He admits that this problem is "rationally insoluble".[2] His way around the problem is to focus on concrete biblical history, where we see that both assertions are true: God is absolutely free and omnipotent and yet He does not accomplish His purposes by controlling man in a mechanistic way.[3] He insists that II Kings "displays concretely the play of what Karl Barth has called the free determination of man in the free decision of God".[4]

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1. The Meaning of the City, p. 174.

2. The Politics of God, p. 15. Ellul defines the metaphysical dilemma as follows: "If God is omnipotent, he cannot allow man any freedom, and man, when he acts, can only execute mecahnically what God has ordained. On the other hand, if man has freedom, if he makes his own decisions, God is simply a theoretical, abstract, or impotent God." He goes on to say of II Kings, "Now in the present stories this academic problem is certainly not solved in global or intellectual fashion. Rather, it is transported into living reality which cannot possibly be schematized. This is why it is so important to keep the stories as they are" (ibid., p. 15).

3. Ibid., pp. 15-17, 63; Jonah, p. 33.

4. The Politics of God, p. 15. Barth indeed does describe God's sovereignty as involving no abridgment of natural man's independence (Barth III/3, pp. 92, 145-6, 149, 165-6). Both Barth and Ellul deny that history is a divine emanation; hence God's creative sovereignty is not to be confused with an endorsement of human sin (Barth, III/3, p. 111). Like Ellul, Barth offers no theoretical solution to the problem of the interrelationship of God's freedom and man's freedom. Instead, he points to the biblical history which/...

Ellul reasons that since God is transcendent, His freedom is on a different level than man's. Natural man pursues his own purposes, according to his own values and intentions; in spite of this, God works creatively in and through man's freedom to accomplish His own will. Man can deny God's command, God's intentional will, but he cannot escape from God's creative freedom to accomplish His purposes.[1] Though God does not constrain man, man's independent decisions are placed "in the secret and vaster plan of God".[2]

Ellul is really saying two things. He is insisting that God is actively at work in and through all events. He is also saying that not all events conform to God's intentional will, not all actions are pleasing to God or are approved by Him. By utilizing this kind of a distinction between God's sovereignty through what He permits and through what He intends,[3] Ellul is able to affirm

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which shows this interrelationship. "If we look at this factual relationship, and therefore at the rule of the God of Israel, we see that it is actually true that in the world-occurrence of God everything has to be and is absolutely under God, and yet everything attains in freedom to its validity and honour" (Barth III/3, p. 189).

Walther Eichrodt's assessment of the Old Testament agrees with Ellul's insistence that God's freedom does not eliminate human freedom. Eichrodt argues that a remarkable thing about the Old Testament is that in spite of its fundamental belief in God's effective action in all things, it never affirms a flat determinism. "At all times the capacity for self-determination is insistently retained." (Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. II, p. 179).

1. The Politics of God, pp. 20, 80-81; Jonah, pp. 32-3, 35.

2. The Politics of God, p. 66.

3. Ellul does not explicitly articulate this distinction. However, he uses language supportive of it ("permission" and "intention") (The Politics of God, pp. 20, 153, 174). More importantly, we believe that the content of what he does say supports the legitimacy of this distinction, as an interpretative aid to understanding his meaning.

a belief in the absolute sovereignty of God, while also recognizing that sinful actions (while not outside the scope of God's providential wisdom) stand condemned by God.[1] By using the distinction between God's intentional and permissive will, he is able to call evil evil, free God from the charge of having intended evil, while at the same time affirming that God is sovereign even there. Through the use of this distinction he is also able to discourage men from pursuing conduct unfaithful to the will of God, while at the same time insisting that in spite of man's sin God is

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1. The Politics of God, p. 175; see also Heinrich Heppe, Reformed Dogmatics, translated by G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1950), pp. 274-280. The distinction between God's intentional and permissive will is not explicitly spelled out in Scripture; it is, rather, an aid to interpreting what Scripture says. There is, however, biblical support for the legitimacy of this distinction. The distinction arises from the simple fact that Scripture teaches that God opposes evil and yet is active through it. God is not said to have created or intended evil (dualism), but permits it and is active in and through what he permits. Of course, this distinction can be given stronger New Testament than Old Testament support, for the New Testament more clearly recognizes a "relative dualism", the sovereignty of Satan which is ultimately subordinate to Christ's sovereignty. Yet even the Old Testament implies such a distinction. When Joseph speaks of God's effective sovereignty in and through his brothers' treacherous conduct (which surely God did not directly intend, but permitted) such a distinction is implied. "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). God is seen to be absolutely sovereign, but sin is seen for what it is. Likewise, in the New Testament, Judas is held accountable for betraying Christ. Though God is seen to be active through Judas' betrayal, Judas' moral worth is not praised!

G.B. Caird argues that a distinction between God's intentional and permissive will is implicit in the theology of The Revelation to John. Caird writes of the author of Revelation, "He is not asking us to believe that war, rebellion, famine, and disease are the deliberate creation of Christ, or that, except in an indirect way, they are what God wills for the men and women he has made. They are the result of human sin ..."(G.B. Caird, The Revelation of St. John the Divine (1966), pp. 82-3). "Throughout his book John is constantly trying to show how Satan's hand may be detected in the affairs of this world; but he is equally insistent that Satan can do nothing except by permission of God, who uses Satan's grimmest machinations to further his own bright designs" (ibid., p. 36).

still the Lord.[1]

As a biblical example of God's sovereignty in and through human disobedience, Ellul refers to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. He says that though, according to the Old Testament, God did not approve of this development (because it would introduce confusion between God and an incarnate representative), He allowed the monarchy to develop and accomplished His purposes in and through it.[2]

Ellul's discussion of "temporal" election is also an expression of the distinction between God's intentional and permissive will. By "temporal election" he means that God can use a sinful nation to accomplish His purposes, but that this involves no endorsement of the sinful conduct of that nation. Ellul argues that, in fact, after such a nation has done its task, it stands condemned by God for its ungodly methods.[3] For example, he refers to the Old Testament belief that God used Assyria to punish Israel; yet the instrument of God's wrath itself stood condemned by God (Isaiah 10:5ff.). Why did Assyria stand under God's judgment? Because its intentions and methods were entirely different from God's. Assyria simply sought to destroy Israel, with utter ruthlessness; it knew nothing of God and His purposes.[4] Its methods of "butchery" and "terror" were only the result of God's "permission". Such methods contradict

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1. When Ellul says that sometimes none of man's decisions enter into God's plan, he surely means this in the sense of conformity to God's intentional will (The Politics of God, pp. 16-17, 68-70). He is surely not affirming a dualism whereby God is seen to be sovereign only over certain aspects of human history, for he can write that "God grants man freedom to do other than God expects, i.e., to do evil. He grants him the freedom to choose. All the same, everything man does is within the global plan of God" (ibid., p. 69).
2. Ibid., pp. 17-18.
3. Ibid., p. 19.
4. Ibid., pp. 19-20; False Presence, p. 34.

God's intentional will, but in a world of sin, God uses even these to accomplish His purposes.[1]

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1. The Politics of God, p. 174. When Ellul speaks of God's creative adaptation to man's sinful rebellion (as, for example, the monarchy), he clearly does not seem to be utilizing an idea of history as the detailed outworking of an eternal predestination. The entire thrust of The Politics of God and the Politics of Man is to stress the dynamic interaction between God's freedom and man's. History is seen to be real history, not only for man, but also for God. Ellul does believe that God has a definite purpose in all that occurs and that this purpose is love (ibid., p. 68). This does not mean, however, that the exact shape of historical events was pre-formed. He explicitly repudiates such a doctrine. He writes, "It is not that there is a preformed plan of God into which the actions of man fit as in a jigsaw puzzle" (ibid., p. 69).

The whole logic of Ellul's position seems inconsistent with a strict predestinarian view of history. It is hard to see how one could affirm, as he does, that God modifies His decisions to take account of man's sin (the monarchy being an example), while at the same time affirming that every detail of history is the outworking of pre-temporal decisions. We have to remember that Ellul can even speak of God repenting. He writes, "When Nineveh repents, God repents too: 'God repented of the evil which he had said he would do them; and he did not do it' [Jonah] (3:10). This is a surprising term to be used of God, and yet it is a common one in Scripture. God decides something, and then events change. Thus God changes his mind. He repents" (Jonah, p. 98).

There are two places where Ellul uses the language of planning, but it is doubtful whether these should be interpreted as implying a doctrine of predestined universal history. At one place where he refers to God's plan, he seems to have in mind God's intentional will active in history, but not a pre-temporal determination of all events (The Politics of God, pp. 16-17).

There is one other place where he seems to affirm predestination. The passage occurs in the context of his exposition of what he regards as the second main point of II Kings, "the free determination of man in the free decision of God" (ibid., p. 15). In that context, the intention to offer a predestinarian view seems most unlikely! In addition, the sentence which precedes the passage in question refers to the subtlety of God's governance of the world, God's respect for man, and God's "successive adaptations", again hardly favouring a predestinarian doctrine. Then in the English translation the following words occur: "Yet all this is also inserted into God's omniscience and omnipotence [my underline] which has prepared everything in advance no matter what may be the solution that each man finally adopts, that God leaves each man free to adopt" (ibid., p. 22). The underlined English word is an incorrect translation. The French word is "l'omniprésence", (Politique de Dieu Politiques de l'Homme, p. 23) which, of course, means omnipresence not omnipotence. It's understandable that the translator made the interpretive substitution of "omnipotence" for "omnipresence", since admittedly it is strange to speak of God's omnipresence as preparing everything in advance. But perhaps this is what Ellul means! He may not be referring to God's omnipotence, which leads one to interpret the words which follow/...

The Apocalyptic Problem[1]

When Ellul talks of the sovereignty of God over the world, he (like Barth) refers to the sovereignty of Christ, not to the sovereignty of some unknown God. When talking of the way in which Christ has become Lord, Ellul and Barth both use language associated with New Testament apocalyptic tradition. In conscious dependence on Barth and Cullmann, Ellul relates his thought about Christ's sovereignty to His death and resurrection and His defeat of demonic powers.[2] He writes, "By his death and resurrection Christ has obtained victory over the powers which are henceforth submitted to him (Col. 2:15). There is the point of departure for His Lordship."[3]

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follow as referring to an eternal and all-powerful resolution determining history. Rather, he may mean that God's presence prepares things in advance, working to accomplish and make concrete God's loving purposes in present history. If this passage is recognized as a doubtful reference to predestination, there does not seem to be any basis for the charge that Ellul sees history as predestined in all details and there is widespread evidence which runs directly contrary.

We have been discussing predestination in the sense of an eternal predetermining of all historical events. Barth uses the word in a different way, but Barth's unique usage is not our concern here. Others use the idea exclusively to emphasize the gift nature of faith. That usage would be consistent with Ellul's understanding of faith, but again that is not the issue under consideration here.

1. The critical remarks that we make here concerning Ellul's use of New Testament apocalyptic tradition in no way imply a total rejection of that tradition. For example, we have already spoken positively of the apocalyptic notion of the overlap of the two ages. Our criticisms do imply that apocalyptic thought must be theologically evaluated and used with discretion -- and that not all aspects of that tradition are equally binding. Ellul himself rejects certain aspects of apocalyptic tradition. For example, he is not at all of the opinion that the end of the world is near (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 32; Prayer and Modern Man, p. 141).

2. The Meaning of the City, p. 164; Protestantisme Français, p. 159.

3. Ibid., p. 159. "Jesus Christ has conquered the world. He has stripped thrones, powers and dominions of their pretensions and their autonomy. He is now and in actuality the Lord of the world and of history" (False Presence, p. 13).

What does Ellul mean by the use of such language? For one thing he believes that the defeat of evil signifies that in the eternal Kingdom evil will be eliminated.[1] Jesus' resurrection means that evil, though active in history, has already been eschatologically defeated. Believers in Christ have faith that evil will not be ultimately triumphant and they have this faith because the ultimate result of history has been foreshadowed in Christ's resurrection. Ellul believes that another result of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection is that the Word of God is now more actively confronting history and enabling men to come to faith and thus find true freedom.[2] One must not over-interpret him here, as though he means that God's Word never encountered history prior to Jesus' resurrection (a glance at The Politics of God and the Politics of Man, a book on II Kings, will dispel that idea!). He apparently means simply that as a consequence of the resurrection, the Holy Spirit is now more directly confronting history than ever before — a claim which the New Testament surely makes. Though Christ's resurrection did not effect a structural change in history, evil is defeated in the sense that it cannot prevent the free and powerful revelation of the Risen Lord.

Ellul can also refer to Jesus' death and resurrection as

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1. Jonah, p. 54.

2. "Historical forces are, as it were, unceasingly repairing the web of necessity, and in different forms the web is being broken, annulled, and disrupted afresh by the action of the power of freedom unleashed at the cross. For Jesus Christ has set in motion the power of freedom, and he has done this very concretely in the course of history, though this does not mean that history has become a kind of triumphal march, stage by stage, of victories for freedom. Our age shows the very opposite. What has been done and gained is that man or men can now acquire the power of freedom, and by them miracles may be done in history" (The Politics of God, p. 187).

involving a kind of reclaiming of a lost world. He thus refers to "the powers ... henceforth [my underline] submitted to him (Col. 2:15)."[1] (Of course, he is not referring to an ontological elimination of evil from history). It is doubtful whether one should put much emphasis on this point, for in The Politics of God and the Politics of Man, he can discuss Old Testament history as though the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has always been the hidden and mysterious Lord of the world. In that book he is quite clear that Christ's lordship over the world is not a mere function of His resurrection. It must be admitted that his discussion at this point evidences a minor contradiction. We are left uncertain as to whether in his understanding Christ's lordship over the world is a function of His role in creation or redemption.[2] Though Ellul does not sort out this contradiction, the way out of the dilemma may be to affirm that the meaning of Christ's resurrection, in terms of His lordship over the world, is of noetic rather than ontic significance. That is, though the Father of Jesus Christ has always been the Lord of the world, this lordship is truly known only as we see it evidenced in Christ's death and resurrection.

Other statements which Ellul makes cut against the idea that Christ's lordship over the world came more fully into existence at His resurrection. Elsewhere he seems to argue the reverse, namely,

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1. Protestantisme Français, p. 159; see also False Presence, p. 13.

2. The New Testament can be quoted on both sides of this issue; hence no solution can come from biblical exegesis as such. Surely at some points the New Testament interprets Christ's lordship in terms of His role in the creation of the world (Col. 1:16; John 1:1-3 is along this line, though it doesn't make the precise point). Other texts relate Christ's sovereignty over the world to His resurrection (Eph. 1:19-22) or His exaltation (Phil. 2:9-11; Acts 2:33-6; I Pet. 3:22).

that as a result of Christ's resurrection the activity of the defeated powers has intensified. Granted the hidden nature of Christ's sovereignty in and through evil, the presence of evil and even its intensification does not annul Christ's ongoing sovereignty. Still, it would seem strange to affirm that Christ's claiming of lordship over the world at the same time resulted in the intensification of evil's activities. Thus, it seems doubtful that we should attribute much significance to Ellul's words where he seems to make Christ's lordship over the world a mere function of His resurrection.

The more serious difficulty in his formation faces us when we ask whether the result of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection can really mean that the activity of evil has intensified. There is no doubt that at some places he says this very thing. It is understandable that after evil's defeat, it still wields "extraordinary power". He appeals to Cullmann, Barth, and Visser't Hooft for this insight and it seems biblically unobjectionable.[1] The problem arises when Ellul presses an illustration used by Cullmann. He appeals to Cullmann's famous illustration of a battle won, but not finished. Ellul points out that the bloodiest struggle against the resistance movement came after 1943, after the Germans had virtually lost the war. Likewise, he argues that though the demonic powers have been eschatologically defeated, their activity has been stepped up as a result of Jesus' death and resurrection. He appeals to New Testament apocalyptic tradition (Mtt. 24:15ff; Rev. 20) to make the point that the demonic power of evil becomes

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1. False Presence, p. 16; The Meaning of the City, p. 164.

even more active in the last days.[1] One wonders if Ellul has not taken Cullmann's illustration more seriously than Cullmann himself. Cullmann was convinced that evil is still active in history and that Christ's sovereignty in general history is hidden — but he did not put an emphasis on the apocalyptic notion that evil's activities are actually increased as a result of Christ's death and resurrection. Neither did Barth.

New Testament apocalyptic tradition can be cited in support of Ellul's contention,[2] but one wonders how theologically meaningful this aspect of apocalyptic tradition is. It is understandable that those who saw Christ's resurrection as the beginning of the end of the world, would apply the traditional apocalyptic signs of the end to the short interval they believed

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1. / The Meaning of the City, pp. 164-5. "We must accept the fact that the powers defeated by Christ are still at work, that they refuse to admit their defeat and are struggling more violently [my underline] than ever. They do gain local victories, and their violence forces us to believe in their power (still real over us), whereas in truth they are subject to Christ" (ibid., p. 166).

2. Wolfgang Trilling argues that the signs discussed in Mtt. 24:3-8 belong to the "last days", but last days which are seen to run their course between the time of Christ's resurrection and His Second Coming, not last days heralding the imminent end of the world. Also, he says that Matthew understood those signs not as absolutely necessary evils connected with the whole of human history, but as signs identified with the birth of the New Age (Wolfgang Trilling, Matthew, Vol. 2, pp. 190-1).

   Luke 21:5-24 certainly applies the apocalyptic signs of the birth of the New Age to the ongoing course of history, and sees these as in some unique way coming into existence as a result of the Christ event. The Lucan modification of Mark in verse 8 makes it certain that Luke envisioned an indefinite period of history. Because of verse 8 one can appeal to Luke on this matter with even more certainty than to Matthew.

   The apocalyptic signs desribed in Mk. 13:6-8, likewise, do not seem connected with the immediate destruction of the world. However, Mk. 13:30 appears to suggest that the entire process ("birth pangs" for an interim and then the signs of the end) would occur in one generation.

would exist between Christ's resurrection and His return. With the extension of history for lo these many centuries a theological problem has been created. Is it any longer tenable to see the apocalyptic signs of distress (wars, famines, etc.) as somehow uniquely called into existence by Christ's death and resurrection? Luke seems able to retain the apocalyptic signs and sees them as applicable to an indefinite period of history, beginning with Christ's resurrection. One wonders, however, whether Luke retained this idea simply because he was reluctant totally to jettison apocalyptic tradition at this point, so instead applied it to the indeterminate interval between Christ's resurrection and His return. One wonders if this were not a half-way measure forced on him by his utilization of Marcan tradition. Our question is simply whether it is theologically tenable to say that history suddenly became more degenerate as a result of the Christ event. Would it not make better sense, granted the delay of the eschaton, to affirm that all history has equally been under the influence of the demonic? That is, must not whatever is said of the time after Christ also be said of the time before?[1]

Ellul applies his New Testament apocalyptic thought when he explains that the dire state of the modern city and state is due to the fact that defeated powers are now more active as a result of Christ's coming.[2] He writes,

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1. Ellul has not affirmed the opposite of an evolutionary view of history. He is not saying that with every tick of the clock the world becomes progressively worse ("Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien", p. 171). All he affirms is that as a result of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, history fell to a lower level, from which it has continued to operate.

2. /The Meaning of the City, pp. 132, 166. It seems blatantly inconsistent to say that Christ's resurrection means that the Holy Spirit is now more active in history (The Politics of God, p. 187) and then to write that the unique characteristic of our time and time since Christ's/...

> Down through the world's history a certain restraint could be seen until Christ's time. The powers observed the rules of war, working rather by trickery and local attacks, and even by positive action. The world after the fall was trying to organize itself to live in its evil, and live "humanly", even though its way was becoming more and more corrupt. But after Jesus Christ, with the beginning of the last events, the "Dominations" are beside themselves. ... There are no more secret offensives, there is no more respect for law, there is rather a free reign of every means.[1]

A theological problem connected with the acceptance of this aspect of apocalyptic thought is the simple fact that if it is true it should be capable of empirical verification. If the world suddenly became worse as a result of the Christ event, secular historians should be able to document that this is the case. I have seen no such validation of these apocalyptic categories and Ellul himself offers no empirical evidence to support his generalization.

Christ's resurrection is the absence of the Spirit. Ellul writes, "Perhaps we are living in an age in which God 'turns away his face', an age of abandonment. Such an age is described in the Gospel apocalypses as that moment 'between the times' in which man no longer discerns any truth, in which power runs rampant, in which there is constant confusion between evil and good (You will call good evil, and evil good), in which man gives reign to every presumption and experiences every terror, in which anguish increases to the point where it is fatal of itself to those who come within its grasp. It is a time of frenzied persecutions, when the very best fall to the sword. This is an age in which, in our shortsighted wisdom, we imagine that God is dead, because we had reduced to nothing our trumped up concept of the God who escapes us" (Prayer..., p. 140). His words of qualification ("if" and "perhaps") are discarded when he writes, "What is taking place in the heart of man is already the eradication of every measure and norm. ... It is the time of trial at the end of the age, in which man no longer feels any need to know God, in which the language of God has become dead, and in which God remains silent to those who call upon him" (ibid., p. 141). "The time of abandonment is something we live and feel within ourselves" (ibid., p. 142).

Ellul's contradictory understanding is evidenced particularly in his book on prayer. At some places he understands prayer as man's response to God's free revelation of His grace (consistently applying Barth's Law-Gospel reversal). At other places he speaks of prayer more as a "combat" to force God's rather reluctant revelation.

1. The Meaning of the City, p. 166.

There is another aspect of Ellul's thought which stands in contradiction to the apocalyptic interpretation we have been discussing. At one place he refers to the apocalyptic signs of distress, but then goes on to speak of the whole of history as being marked by these characteristics. He writes,

> Jesus announces for the end of time a multiplication of misery and wars. And the Apocalypse teaches us that the whole of human history is made by the gallop of the four horses. They represent the constants of History, and are War, Famine, Sickness, and the Word of God.[1]

From the last two sentences about the Apocalypse one might get the impression that Ellul sees history as having always been similar; yet the first sentence speaks of an increase of misery connected with the period following the Christ event. If this statement is a borderline one, he has another one where he clearly affirms that history has always been marked by the very features the synoptic apocalypses describe as the situation between Christ's resurrection and His return.[2] Likewise, in the major part of The Meaning of

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1. "Sur le Pessimisme Chrétien", p. 169.

2. "For to us things are normal when they are going well. Health, affluence, peace — these are normal, so convinced are we of our own righteousness, of what is our due. But Scripture teaches the very opposite. Unfortunately what is normal now that man is separated from God is war and murder, famine and pollution, accident and disruption. When there is a momentary break in the course of these disasters, when abundance is known, when peace timidly establishes itself, when justice reigns for a span, then it is fitting, unless we are men of too little faith, that we should marvel and give thanks for so great a miracle, realizing that no less than the love and faithfulness of the Lord has been needed in order that there might be this privileged instant" (The Politics of God, pp. 178-9).
   Prior to the 1948 publication of Présence au Monde Moderne there is no evidence that Ellul had considered the apocalyptic interpretation we have been criticizing. In Le Fondement Théologique du Droit (1946) he reasoned in the opposite way, as though Christ's resurrection meant the diminishing of evil's influence. He wrote, "Even within history justice can sometimes express itself through human judgment. This is a sign that Jesus Christ has truly conquered the demonic powers. ... Not only do all human judgments find their consummation in the judgment of God, but the validity and power of God's judgment are already reflected in the /...

the City Ellul sounds pessimistic about the city from its very beginning. If a pessimism is implied to have increased at any point, it seems to be more in the modern period, not from the resurrection onward. Even when he refers to the world as having become worse as a result of Christ's resurrection, he appeals to modern history as evidence of this (The Meaning of the City, p. 166). If appeal is to be made to this aspect of apocalyptic thought, then the twenty centuries in the interim must be cited as evidence, not just the recently modern technological society!

Concerning his use of the apocalyptic category of history becoming worse as a result of Christ's resurrection, we can only conclude that Ellul is self-contradictory. The impression one gets is that he has "flirted" with this aspect of apocalyptic thought, but has never become convinced enough to be able to offer a consistent articulation of the same.

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judgments of man. In other words, every judgment announces the coming, even the presence of this absolute judgment of God" (Theological Foundation of Law, p. 116).

CHAPTER VII

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THE CHRISTIAN LIFE AND THE POLITICAL ORDER

Over against theologians who make theological statements about the political order without reference to social reality and in opposition to politicians who speak of political reality without reference to theological considerations, Ellul believes that an adequate understanding of the state can be obtained only by setting theological affirmations in conversation or confrontation with political reality.[1] Since this is the case, we would misunderstand what he says on our topic were we to deal only with his theological beliefs. However, theme and space[2] prohibit us from attempting a complete appraisal of his sociological analysis and his critique of political reality. We will consider such analysis and critique only insofar as it directly informs a normative view as to what Christians ought to think and do. In following this procedure we are simply adhering to the methodological principle that we have no independent interest in Ellul's sociology or his critique of the modern world.

Though we will not attempt an exhaustive analysis of Ellul's sociological views on this topic, we will take account of the integral interrelationship of theological and sociological ideas. It would be a mistake to attempt here to separate theology from sociology. He certainly distinguishes between the two, but at most points he

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1. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 129.

2. Ellul has written so extensively on modern political reality that that in itself could be the subject of an entire dissertation.

discusses the same issue from both of these angles.[1] When we consider his analysis of political reality, we generally find both theological and sociological considerations. Likewise, when he suggests Christian responses, these are based on theological convictions, but also take account of modern political reality as he understands it. Since normative views are always based on biblical considerations, it is easy enough to see the distinction between what Ellul says as a believer and what he says as a sociologist. This being so, our structure is designed to show the interrelationship between theological and sociological ideas.

Our procedure will be to move from a consideration of Ellul's analysis of a particular political problem to his responses, taking into account relevant theological and sociological factors at both points. (When dealing with the responses, we will sometimes be discussing attitudes, sometimes acts, and sometimes a combination of both.) We will make this movement from problem to response three times, first dealing with the problem of politization, secondly, the issue of political autonomy, and thirdly, the related issues of the inability of modern citizens to effectively control political affairs or to effectively participate in political parties.

The Politicizing of the World and the Church

We now turn to the first problem area, politization. By politization Ellul basically means the state's tendency to make a

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1. The problems of control and participation are discussed entirely from a sociological angle, but the proposed response is based as much on normative theological considerations as it is related to the particular sociological issues. When Ellul deals with the problem of politization and that of autonomy, both analysis and response are based on theological and sociological factors. Since theological issues are involved at most points of analysis and all points dealing with response, he cannot be justly accused of simply correlating theological answers to fit sociological problems.

religion out of itself. He tells us that the Old Testament indicates that the state always has a tendency to sacralize itself, to step beyond its appointed limits. He says that Jeroboam's sin (I Kings 12:26-33)

> was precisely that he made theological and religious decisions regarding the true God for political reasons, thus subordinating the spiritual life of the people to political necessity, ... seizing control of the revelation of God ... We have here ... a political power which creates a state religion or which uses the ... revelation of God ... for political ends. [1]

> We see here the intentional and deliberate establishment of a national religion in the service of the state and for the purpose of unifying national sentiment. There is nothing at all "primitive" about this. It is just what we do too. Every modern state thinks that it should establish in the same way a full-scale religion which will serve to unite the people and make it loyal to the political power, integrating the church so that it will be "national" and will fill this same role.[2]

> The sin of Jeroboam which is repeated by all the Kings of Israel and by Ahaz, is not the result of a primitive view of the deity. It is rather the result of an enduring political necessity. A state is insecure unless there is a state religion. Politics demands religion as an ally. But Jeroboam's problem is that the pure revelation of Yahweh cannot be integrated into politics. It cannot be exploited in this way because it is the fact of the living God.[3]

At the very centre of Ellul's political concern, is his belief that the state is a relative and limited thing. Though the state is important for the establishment of order, equilibrium and a relative justice, he insists that these are limited functions having nothing to do with the establishment of the good revealed by God. He even says that every time the state is attacked in the Bible, it is attacked for its inordinate pride, its tendency to overstep its limits.[4] He explicitly agrees with F.J. Leenhardt that Christians

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1. The Politics of God, p. 125.
2. Ibid., p. 125.
3. Ibid., pp. 125-6.
4. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 163, 166.

ought to oppose the inordinate pride of a state which claims the allegiance of the whole man. Both agree that Christians are called to honour the state, but that total devotion and love are reserved for God.[1]

Turning from exegetical considerations to sociological ones, we see that Ellul's awareness of modern politization occurs in the context of a broad awareness that the modern world tends to sacralize itself. In his view, the chief characteristic of the modern world is not absence of religion, but the powerful presence of secular religions, not secularisms, but idolatry.[2] He thinks that what has happened in the modern world is that Jesus Christ has been de-sacralized and secular gods have assumed the position of ultimate loyalty.

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1. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 151, 169; for an identical point of view see Barth, Community, p. 143.

2. "Les Religions Seculières", pp. 64, 77; see also "Le Sacré dans le Monde Moderne", Le Semeur, No. 2(1963), p. 24. Ellul disagrees with those who think that the chief characteristic of modern man is his secular rationality. He argues that "man come of age" is really an invention of rationalistic theologians (expressing their own opinions) and is completely out of touch with actual reality (A Critique, pp. 78-9). He says that the modern world is a religious one, and appeals to such phenomena as the popularity of horoscopes, the widespread use of drugs, the religious veneration of Mao, and the worshipful quest for material abundance to make his point (A Critique, p. 78; "Les Religions Seculières", pp. 69-75).
Ellul thinks that the strategy of proclaiming Christianity by appealing to "non-religious" man is misguided ("Les Religions Seculières", pp. 64, 77; A Critique, p. 78). He insists that Christian proclamation ought to proceed by challenging man's idolatries, rather than by adapting the Christian message to modern man: "It is not a question of announcing the message to a scientific man who believes nothing, but to a religious man who believes another thing, who has put his faith ... elsewhere. And consequently it is a debate 'Truth of God — Religion' and not 'Kerygma — science'. It cannot therefore be either the scientific interpretation of Christianity, nor a Christian rationalism which would have the least chance of causing the Gospel to be heard. It is the intrinsic power of 'desacralization', 'demythologization', 'dereligiousization' (!) by revelation which can work ..." ("Les Religions Seculières", p. 78). Rather than demythologizing the Bible, Ellul accepts the Bible in a quite straightforward way and uses it to demythologize the modern world (False Presence, pp. 206-7; "Les Religions Seculières", p. 78).

Operating with a Barthian acceptance of the inevitable conflict between God's revelation in Christ and all human religion,[1] he undertakes a scathing attack upon the modern idols, in the hope that this might contribute to a re-sacralizing of Christian faith.

We cannot understand Ellul's critical attitude toward politics unless we remember that he is committed to Christ and hence resentful of what he regards as modern man's veneration of politics as a sacred area of ultimate truth.[2] He writes, "Man now experiences faith and religious conversion thanks to his participation in politics. What was lost by the church has been found by the parties, at least those worthy of the name."[3] Politization is the substitution of political concern for Christian commitment, the absolutizing of the relative.[4]

Though the form of state veneration today is not the same as that asked and refused by New Testament Christians, this does not mean that the ultimate claim of the state is any less real. When Ellul describes modern politization he is describing what he believes to be a different form of the same claim. Today politization is the tendency to think that all problems are political and can be solved only by political means.[5] Since all of life's problems

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1. "Le Sacré dans le Monde Moderne", p. 24.
2. Ibid., p. 30.
3. The Political Illusion, p. 21.
4. Ibid., pp. 19-20. "I disagree with observers who believe the average citizen lacks political passion and exhibits general skepticism and indolence. On the contrary, some latent political passion appears to exist which erupts on any occasion and at every event. What is lacking is truly reasoned opinions, certainly not passion" (ibid., p. 202). "The mass man is 'Immersed in the immediate present, disoriented, incapable of true political reflection', but he by no means necessarily lacks political opinions" (Lasch et al., Katallagete, p. 24, quoting The Political Illusion, p. 75).
5. The Political Illusion, p. 185.

are seen to be political, more and more power is placed in the hands of the centralized state. The state becomes omnipotent, directing all of the activities of the individuals within its borders.[1]

> We consider it obvious that everything must be unreservedly subjected to the power of the state; it would seem extraordinary to us if any activity should escape it. The expansion of the state's encroachment upon all affairs is exactly paralleled by our conviction that all things must be that way. ... It is not just the fact of the state being at the center of our lives that is crucial, but our spontaneous and personal acceptance of it as such. We believe that for the world to be in good order, the state must have all powers.[2]
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> The place we accord in our hearts to the state and political activity leads us to an interpretation of history which we regard primarily as political history. ... We cannot escape the strange view that history is ultimately a function of the state. Only where the state is, is history worth the name.[3]

What bothers Ellul even more than the fact that men today commonly regard politics as all-important, is the fact that the Church to a large extent is following suit. To him the politicizing of the Church involves a relativizing of Jesus Christ as the true

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1. "To think of everything as political, to conceal everything by using this word (with intellectuals taking the cue from Plato and several others), to place everything in the hands of the state, to appeal to the state in all circumstances, to subordinate the problems of the individual to those of the group, to believe that political affairs are on everybody's level and that everybody is qualified to deal with them — these factors characterize the politization of modern man and, as such, comprise a myth. The myth then reveals itself in beliefs and, as a result, easily elicits almost religious fervour. We cannot conceive of society except as directed by a central omnipresent and omnipotent state. What used to be a utopian view of society, with the state playing the role of the brain, not only has been ideologically accepted in the present time but also been profoundly integrated into the depths of our consciousness. ... We can no longer conceive of a society with autonomous 'in-between' groups or divergent activities"(see The Political Illusion, pp. 12-13).
2. The Political Illusion, p. 13; see also p. 9. "This aspiration, this unconscious assigning of the supreme role to the state leads us immediately to the consideration that everything is now its business. The question returns again and again, like some evidence that it would be absurd to protest: 'But after all, what is there that is not political?'(ibid., p. 14). "God is dead. He must be replaced! Only a creature invested with super-human powers, a multiple will, and an intelligence born of several brains can give us enough confidence: the state!" (A Critique, p. 108).
3. The Political Illusion, pp. 13-14.

Object of faith, from those who ought to know better. Just as politization involves the sacralizing of political reality, so the politicization of the Church involves such a sacralizing and an identification of Christian faith with political commitments or ideologies.[1] He points out that for some Christians today, political involvement has become the major test of the sincerity of the Christian faith. Biblical passages not related to politics are re-interpreted to show political meaning. Political involvement becomes so important that persons and Churches are judged (by Christians!) according to political criteria. Those not involved in politics are seen to be hypocrites. The Christian presence in the world is identified with a political presence, as though the only way to witness to Christ were to engage in political activity.[2]

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1. "The rabies politica has infected the best among Christians so gravely that for them the incarnation has become identical with political commitment, and all judgments passed are now political judgments" (A Critique, p. 104; see also False Presence, p. 96). "I heard a typical Christian say, 'You can't be a Christian if you don't have a certain position on the Algerian problem.' I was dumbfounded! Thus one's political opinion on such a difficult question, characterized by such fluctuating information and criteria of judgment (one must also take into account individual capacities and knowledge), becomes the criterion for the authenticity of one's faith!" (A Critique, p. 105).

2. False Presence, pp. 95-6. Ellul gives an historical assessment of the relationship of the Church to the state which points to the present bondage of the Church to the political order. He argues that in the New Testament period the Church was independent with reference to the state. With Constantine there began a liaison between Church and state, but the Church still retained a degree of autonomy and usually claimed the right to control the state. He believes that a third stage is now being reached; as Christians become politicized the Church loses her autonomy and becomes the state's servant (A Critique, pp. 106-7). (Paul Ramsey writes, "The oddity is that contemporary ecumenical social ethics evidences less acknowledgment of the separation between the church and the office of magistrate or citizen than was clearly acknowledged by the great cultural churches of the past ...") (Paul Ramsey, Who Speaks for the Church? (1969), p. 20). The Church becomes a cheering section for the political goals of the state. "Truth is becoming political. Morality must be political. Faith is expressed in terms of politics. The man who formulated this illuminating revelation would make a good Christian: 'When you grant priority to politics, actions and people become good. When you do not, people and their acts become bad/...

As evidence of the politization of the Church, Ellul refers to the passion Christians interject into their speeches and articles on political topics. He argues that politically motivated French Christians are much more impassioned and excited concerning political questions than are other Frenchmen.[1] He says that if Christians engage in politics it is out of an agonizing compunction which causes their judgments to be sharply defined and their relations with others strained.[2]

> It is easier, for example, to discuss communism with an intellectual belonging to the Communist Party than with a progressive Protestant, and to exchange views on a political issue with non-Christians of divergent shades of opinion than with Christians.[3]

One aspect of the politicizing of the Church, which Ellul particularly deplores, is the devaluation of a biblically based theology in preoccupation with what is regarded as more important, the political issues of the day.[4]

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bad.' Unfortunately, it was only Marshal Lin Piao" (A Critique, p. 107). Ellul accuses political Christians of being sectarians, of focusing on one aspect of revelation in Scripture and making that single issue the either-or of faith. The only difference he sees is that the interpretative key is seen as politics, rather than as speaking in tongues, adult baptism, or non-violence (False Presence, p. 99).

1. False Presence, p. 94. "They deliver their political speeches with an indignation, an uncompromising quality and a seriousness which are overwhelming. There must be total involvement!" (False Presence, p. 94).

2. Ibid., p. 95.

3. Ibid., p. 95. Of course False Presence of the Kingdom is written in response to the French Christian situation and specifically in response to the situation in the Reformed Church of France. However, Ellul believes that these problems are true of the modern Church as a whole (False Presence, p. vi).

4. A Critique, p. 105. "Nobody gets excited about the divinity of Jesus Christ, but as for Algeria, now there's a real question. ... The question of salvation by grace is no longer important, of course, but the question of the church's position on political peace is essential" (A Critique, p. 106).

> One need only consider the great preoccupation of the churches today. Are they interested in better understanding and formulating the truth? In converting men to Jesus Christ? In discovering ways in which a Christian can live by his faith? These are merely minor preoccupations. The great thing is to know what political position to support, for the church to prove it is a political force, to formulate a message to the world on its political problems. Until the church has stated its position on decolonization or Berlin, it has said nothing."[1]

He thinks that the current devaluation of theology and obsession with political issues is simply due to conformity to a modern world indifferent to theological truth.[2]

Ellul criticizes Christians for taking political stands without reference to Christian theological conviction (and also for being inadequately informed on the political issues). He believes that the only thing that can make a Christian decision on a social or political issue authoritative, is faithfulness to the God revealed in Christ. Apart from some connection with revelation, he thinks that Christian opinions are as relative as those of non-believers.[3] He recognizes that Christians, like all other people, hold human opinions — but he thinks that the Church distorts her own faith if she confuses tentative and debatable human opinions with what can be said authoritatively, that is, on the basis of scriptural revelation. He believes that by and large Christian thinking on political issues is simply the expression of the social milieu in which various Christians live and has nothing to do with Christianity.[4]

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1. A Critique, p. 103.
2. Ibid., p. 106.
3. Paul Ramsey makes the same point, saying that unless it can be shown that Christian teaching compellingly leads to a particular political conclusion, such a conclusion simply puts "the engine of religious fervor behind a particular partisan political point of view which would have as much or as little to recommend it if it had not emanated from a church council" (Paul Ramsey, Who Speaks for the Church? pp. 31-2).
4. False Presence, pp.141-5, 148, 178, 182-3. He says that having read innumerable articles written by Christians (of the left and the right/...

Ellul believes that the effect that politization is having on the Church is to increase division and hatred among Christians of differing political persuasions and between political Christians and those Christians who take no interest in political involvement. Whereas previously the Church was divided over questions of theological truth, he believes that she is now becoming divided on the basis of conflicting political credos.[1] He questions whether politics is of such value as to warrant such division.[2]

The difference between Ellul and the politicized Christians that he criticizes is that he thinks that by and large political issues are so ambiguous that Christianity cannot be said to stand on

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right) on Algeria, he discovered only political choices made for entirely human reasons. Not only does he say that these judgments did not differ in the least from non-Christian ones, but he also states that it is easy to predict what a Christian will say on a political issue simply by a knowledge of what sources of information were taken into account (False Presence, pp. 140-1). Along these lines, he argues that Christian students make their political decisions more in terms of their identity as students, and less in terms of their identity as Christians (False Presence, p. 143).

1. The Political Illusion, p. 20. Ellul writes, "If you throw the Suez question or the problem of Algeria in 1959 before a congregation of Christians, you will see them tear each other to pieces like dogs over a bone" (A Critique, p. 106).

2. False Presence, p. 97. "I would not hesitate to stake the unity of the Church on a question of truth, but the political debate, the choice among political options, the presence to the world by way of politics is not a question of truth. ... Political questions can be burning questions in the world, but if they are burning questions that is the spirit of the world. The One-who-divides, the Deceiver, he it is who makes them that way. To accept them as such into the Church is to obey that spirit" (ibid., p. 98).
Along similar lines Paul Ramsey writes, "This identification of Christian social ethics with specific partisan proposals that clearly are not the only ones that may be characterized as Christian and as morally acceptable comes close to the original and the New Testament meaning of heresy. It introduces divisions into the life that may properly be a confession of the faith of the church. This, at least, was Paul's meaning when he condemned the factions (hairesis) among the Corinthians (I Cor. 11:18, 19)..." (Paul Ramsey, Who Speaks for the Church? pp. 55-6).

one side of the issues involved. To the contrary, political Christians think that on most political issues there is one definite side on which the Church ought to stand. The difference between Ellul and those he criticizes seems to be one of degree (though this difference of degree is vitally important). For example, we have seen earlier that he believes that the Christian faith implies support for racial integration and that the latter leads the Church to defend economic integration.[1] On the basis of his reasoning, the Church ought firmly and unanimously to oppose explicitly racist policies.[2] Ellul's claim, however, is that most political issues are not that simple. In making this latter point, he criticizes what he calls the "Barmen complex". Before he does so he admits that the Church was right in what she said at the Synod of Barmen in 1934, though he thinks that she should have acted sooner and should not have waited until the Nazi state began to interfere with Church affairs. His major point, however, is to insist that most day-to-day political issues simply cannot be pressed into the Barmen mould. He believes that the political situation is seldom as clear-cut and decisive and he thinks that political Christians make a major mistake in so thinking.[3]

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1. See above, pp. 137-138.

2. Of course, it is still a matter of debate as to what policies actually favour racial integration and what ones oppose it. It's just that on those occasions where a political choice is openly racist, the Church as Church can speak in opposition. In other cases, Christians are to discuss proposals and make individual decisions as to what policies do or do not favour racial integration.

3. False Presence, pp. 106-7. "Since 1945, French Protestant intellectuals have been dreaming only of Barmen. The Reformed Church in France must manage to say something just as good. That, undoubtedly, is one of the unconscious reasons behind the urge to issue statements. One dreams of the day when he might finally say something as decisive in the Reformed Church of France. It is generally forgotten that we have never been in as decisive a situation as that of Germany in 1933. This also explains the exaggerated and grandiloquent style used in statements about every event in French politics. In all good faith, parachutists are transformed into SS troops, de Gaulle into/...

One may question whether Ellul has given an accurate statement of the degree of politization in the Church, since he studies statements by French Christian intellectuals and tends to forget that they represent but one aspect of the Church's thinking.[1] One may think that the traditional dangers of pietism are much more real than he in his later writings seems to recognize. Even so, his warnings concerning the danger of politization in the Church are both timely and helpful and the problem he describes may increasingly become a major one for the Church (though one suspects that the pietistic problem will linger on).

The Relativity of the Political Order

So far we have discussed Ellul's biblical and sociological analysis of the tendency of the state to sacralize itself and for politics to become unduly important (for men in general and for Christians in particular). We will now look at his Christian reasons for opposing politization, his biblical arguments for the relativity of the political order and his biblical understanding that most political issues are likewise relative.

Against those who find political meaning everywhere in Scripture and assume that political participation is imperative, Ellul points out that the passages in the Epistles dealing with politics are very few in number in comparison with the great bulk of theological and ethical teaching.[2] This in itself would argue against the devaluing

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into Hitler, the CRS (the police units created in 1945 to maintain order) into the Gestapo, etc., etc. The Barmen complex naturally leads the French Protestant intellectual to take his stand with the left (a second boost in that direction), since Barmen was a great stand in opposition to fascism (hence in opposition to the right)" (False Presence, p. 107; see also A Critique, p. 104, for a rather unclear statement on the same subject).

1. False Presence, pp. 5-6.

2. Ibid., p. 114. Ellul fails to mention that New Testament Christians were largely from the lower socio-economic classes (many being slaves). This/...

of theology and the exaltation of political concerns. In addition, he says that even the passages which do deal with issues related to politics do not provide a basis for the necessity of active participation (though he thinks that they do not prohibit such).[1] He agrees with F.J. Leenhardt that the Christian recognition of the importance of the state must not be confused with the necessity of direct political activity.[2] Ellul makes an interesting distinction between theological reflection, talk about the meaning of politics and political activity as such. He agrees that the former is necessarily of importance to Christians, but insists that it must not be confused with the latter.[3]

This being the case, most early Christians were not in a position to be involved in political affairs (Ernst Käsemann, New Testament Questions, pp. 205-6). He reasons that because there was political activity in Jesus' day, the Christian situation with reference to the state was similar to our own (False Presence, pp. 115-116; "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 161). The similarity breaks down if many Christians (because of their class) had no access to political channels. (Paul, though a Roman citizen, was writing by and large to such Christians).

Likewise the eschatological perspective of the early Church was different from that of the Church today. Many Christians expected the imminent consummation and hence were not likely to be concerned to improve the social order. With the continuation of history for these many centuries, it is only natural that we should be more concerned to improve the social structures of the world than were the early Christians. Oscar Cullmann, on whom Ellul depends for much of his theology concerning the state, is aware of this point, though Ellul is silent here (Oscar Cullmann, Jesus and the Revolutionaries, pp. 54-5; Salvation in History, p. 337).

We do not claim that these two arguments destroy Ellul's case that political involvement is not imperative for Christians, only that they are factors which should be frankly acknowledged.

1. False Presence, p. 114.

2. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 153, 166.

3. The Politics of God, p. 14. He writes, "Karl Barth himself confuses the state and politics when he says that since Christians recognize in the order of the sword, of constraint, and of fear a divine dispensation, they cannot be antipolitical or apolitical" (The Politics of God, p. 14). He opposes Barth's tendency to regard direct political activity as mandatory for Christians ("Rappels et Réflexions", p. 162; see also Barth, Community, State and Church, pp. 145, 157, 159). Barth, for example, asks how Christians can pray for the state if they are not themselves directly involved in political activity. He then goes on to answer his question by saying that political participation is imperative, attributing this thought/...

He also insists that biblical passages related to politics do not give concrete directives concerning voting, belonging to a party, etc.[1]

Against those who would make political participation mandatory for Christians, Ellul points out that Jesus and His disciples represent a supra-political position:[2]

> One hesitates to bring up the obvious fact, which nevertheless is generally forgotten, that Jesus paid no attention to problems of politics. He definitely refuses to take the lead in the Jewish nationalist movement. He recognizes the authority of the invader. He advises the normal payment of taxes (which was then a burning issue with the Jews). He displays an indifference toward the questions of taxes, showing its unimportance by the story of the fish (Matthew 17:24ff.). He welcomes 'collaborators' and traitors, and at no time does he take a stand against the numerous political scandals which were rampant in Judea.[3]

Ellul says that in Jesus' conversation with Pilate He admits that power exists only because God gives it (Jn. 19:11), but manifests indifference with reference to the particular people who wield power ("'My kingship is not of this world'" (Jn. 18:36).[4]

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thought even to Paul (Barth, Against the Stream, pp. 81-2). He fails to realize that the fact of the matter is that New Testament Christians did pray for the state, but apparently were not involved directly in political activity. Of course, on both Barth's and Ellul's terms, the Christian would have to criticize the state if it denied the Church the civil liberties necessary for the preaching of the Gospel in word and deed (see below, pp. 270-72; see also Barth, Community, State and Church, p. 138). This, however, would not necessarily imply continuous political activity on the part of Christians.

Ellul can be criticized for failing to regard practical political discussion leading to voting decisions as a part of political activity. He seems to regard direct political activity as entirely a matter of assuming a leadership role within a party or state (The Politics of God, p. 14).

1. False Presence, p. 114.

2. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 161; A Critique, p. 104.

3. False Presence, p. 113. Ellul quite rightly points out that there was great political agitation in Jesus' day, especially among nationalistic Jews insisting on independence (ibid., p. 114; "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 160; see also Cullmann, Jesus and the Revolutionaries, pp. 4-5).

4. False Presence, pp. 113-114.

Political Christians often go to the Old Testament to establish the prime importance of political activity. Ellul very wisely insists that the Old Testament politics of Israel cannot be used to justify the necessity of Christian participation in politics today. The theocratic situation of a state being both Church and state is totally different from the modern "secular" state[1] and even different from the state in the New Testament.[2]

The politicizing of Christian thought is often supported by the assumption that the Bible can be used to defend the preferability of a particular form of modern government. Ellul disagrees with this line of reasoning on biblical grounds. He thinks that the Bible says absolutely nothing about the relative preferability of a particular form of governmental structure. If the Bible were committed to a particular form of the state, he thinks that it would have spoken of institutions and regimes instead of authorities who ruled as individuals.[3] He believes that the Bible gives no timeless verdict on this issue and that a decision in favour of one institutional form as opposed to another is a human decision related to the particularities involved in available options.[4]

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1. False Presence, p. 113.

2. Ellul also relies on other Old Testament passages to support the relativity of politics. He points to passages which condemn the establishment of political power in Israel (I Samuel; Zechariah 11:6). He reminds us that Ecclesiastes regarded political power as vain and futile (False Presence, p. 111). He says that though the prophets foresaw and spoke of various political actions and addressed the Word of God to particular situations, they seldom themselves engaged directly in political activity (The Politics of God, pp. 85-6; False Presence, p. 113).

3. False Presence, pp. 110-111; "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 160; L'Homme et l'Argent, pp. 26-29.

4. Ellul follows F.J. Leenhardt and Calvin at this point, in opposition to Barth's view that one can use the Bible to establish the preferability of one form of government (in Barth's case democratic socialism). ("Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 132, 153, 160, 162-3; False Presence, pp. 147-8; see also Barth, Community, State and Church, pp. 144-5, 182). (It/...

Ellul has many additional biblical arguments concerning the relativity of the state. Traditional theology has often used Rom. 13 and parallel passages to support the necessity of Christian subservience to the particular institutional state existing at the time. Ellul has a way of dealing with Rom. 13 which enables him to adopt a more critical attitude toward the modern state. He relativizes the teaching concerning submission to "authorities" by the sociological observation that New Testament submission to men in authority is different from modern submission to an impersonal "state". He says that biblical texts do not refer to an abstract structure and hence do not justify a modern institutional and bureaucratic mechanism. Rather, the New Testament sees authority as incarnate in a particular person or in several persons.[1]

(It was Calvin's personal belief that "aristocracy, or a system compounded of aristocracy and democracy, far excels all others." Yet he admitted that the preferability of a particular form of government "admits no simple solution but requires deliberation, since the nature of the discussion depends largely upon the circumstances. And if you compare the forms of government among themselves apart from circumstances, it is not easy to distinguish which one of them excels in usefulness, for they contend on such equal terms" (Calvin, Institutes, Volume 2, p. 1493). "Divine providence has wisely arranged that various countries should be ruled by various kinds of government" (ibid., p. 1494).)

Ellul knows that it is an historical fact that Christianity has been used to justify the most diverse and contradictory forms of government. He points out that on this issue Christians are split today into two camps, reflecting not Christian freedom, but the simple political division of the world (False Presence, pp. 133-135). Behind his reasoning is his knowledge that Capitalism and Communism both reflect and deny particular Christian"values". To mention only the positive side, Capitalism can be said to emphasize the importance of individual freedom, but likewise Communism can be said to be sensitive to social justice and the cause of the poor (False Presence, p. 132).

In support of biblical relativity concerning various forms of government, Kornelis H. Miskotte writes, "In the sources of the Old Testament politeia (the books of Samuel and Kings) the kingship is by turns rejected and approved, the theocracy is regarded as absolute or charismatic or placed in the Davidic dynasty, and in the setting of the ancient East it presents an almost complete relativization of the possible forms a state may take" (Miskotte, When the Gods are Silent, p. 274).

1. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 157-8, 160; False Presence, p. 110. "Let/...

Ellul draws an interesting practical conclusion from his sociological critique of the traditional interpretation of Rom. 13. Not only are Christians to regard the modern state as a relative thing, but they are also to "look behind the abstraction, structure and institution for who is the truly responsible person and bearer of authority."[1] Since an abstract entity like the state is never responsible, "the first operation of the Christian toward the political structure consists in rediscovering who must answer for authority."[2]

Ellul brings his understanding of man as a sinner to bear at this point. If it is true that all men are sinners, then this is also true of political men in their activity as leaders of the state. The simple belief that all men are sinners should itself lead Christians to avoid any uncritical sacralizing of the political realm or of political decisions.[3]

In defence of the limited scope of the state's claim on man, Ellul refers to Jesus' attitude, as evidenced in the passage on rendering unto God the things of God and unto Caesar the things of Caesar (Mtt. 22:17-22). He insists that this passage does not teach that Christians are subject to two equally important Kingdoms, but that the whole man is claimed by God, though within this loyalty to God Christians can be expected to pay governmental taxes.[4] He puts

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"Let no one say: 'It is that way because that was an age in which power was personalized.' The system of the Polis was still in existence, and the Respublica had not disappeared. It is an historical error to claim that if the Gospel writers spoke only of a personal power that was because there were no other kinds. The Romans had a fully elaborated abstract doctrine of the State. Hence we need to ask ourselves why these passages mention only the persons exercising the power, and never the regimes" (False Presence, pp. 110-111; see also p. 67).

1. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 158. "We can accept neither the irresponsibility of political men (hiding themselves behind the organization) nor the idea of the 'supreme authority' of the state" (ibid., p. 159).

2. Ibid., p. 158.

3. Ibid., p. 159.

4. Ibid., p. 165.

great emphasis on the fact that the state's claim on man is small (the payment of taxes), whereas God's claim is all-inclusive. "The State has the right to claim that which is necessary for its maintenance but nothing more; if it claims more, one must refuse and resist it because it oversteps its limits."[1]

Ellul believes that obedience to the ways of the future Kingdom, revealed in Christ, leads to a distancing from the ways of the world. Since the political order is of this world, it is to be relativized in the name of allegiance to God's future Kingdom.[2] He points out that New Testament eschatology sees political powers as destined for judgment and annihilation (I Cor. 15:24), a point especially emphasized in the book of Revelation.[3]

Ellul is consciously dependent on Oscar Cullmann's exegetical understanding.[4] Cullmann wrote of Jesus' transcendent relationship to the political movements of His day:-

> It is my thesis that Jesus of Nazareth cannot be simply viewed as belonging to any of the principal movements prevailing in his land at his time. For his radical obedience to the will of God, which is anchored in the most intimate communion with God and in the expectation of his kingdom and in his prevailing justice, transcends the framework of those groups which supported the existing order in Palestine as well as those which opposed it with force.[5]

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1. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 166; see also "On the Cultural and Social Factors Influencing Church Division", Ecumenical Review, 4 (April 1952), p. 274; Cullmann, The State in the New Testament, (1963), pp. 32-33, 44; Jesus and the Revolutionaries, pp. 46-7.
2. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 167. "Rigorous and total attention to the Kingdom of God must lead us to minimize the importance of the state, which is not a definitive divine institution, but a possibility for life which is given to us in this time. The state which claims to be eternal or which claims to establish an eternal reign transgresses its own reality..." (ibid., p. 167).
3. False Presence, pp. 111-112.
4. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 165-6.
5. Cullmann, Jesus and the Revolutionaries, pp. vii-viii.

"The fact that Jesus called tax-collectors along with Zealots shows better than anything else that he stood beyond this opposition."[1] "Jesus' attitude is to be sought beyond any uncritical absolutizing of the Roman State, and at the same time beyond any thoroughgoing political resistance to it."[2] On the one hand Cullmann points to sayings which indicate that Jesus did not respect the rulers of his day (Lk. 13:32, 22, 25).[3] On the other hand, he says that Jesus' belief in non-violence (Mtt. 5:39ff.) and His advocacy of love for enemies separated Him from all political revolutionaries.[4]

Cullmann's interpretation is based finally on New Testament eschatology, which is seen in Jesus' own eschatological understanding and elsewhere. Christians are to support the state, because it is necessary in a fallen world. Yet Christians can be critical of the state, because their allegiance is to a transcendent Kingdom.[5]

> Jesus does not regard the State as a final institution to be equated somehow with the Kingdom of God. The State belongs to the age which still exists even now, but which will definitely vanish as soon as the Kingdom of God comes. Accordingly Jesus' disciples have both the right and the duty to judge the State on the basis of their knowledge of the coming Kingdom and of the will of God. As long as this age still continues, however, the existence of the State is willed by God — even the existence of the heathen Roman State, although it is not of divine nature. Consequently it is not the business of the disciple of Jesus to assume the initiative in abolishing this State as an institution. Rather he is to give the State what it needs for its existence. On the other hand, as soon as the State demands more than is necessary to its existence, as soon as it demands what is God's — thus transgressing its limits — the disciple of Jesus is relieved of all obligations to this requirement of a totalitarian State.[6]

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1. Cullmann, The State, p. 22; see Mtt. 2:15, 9:10, 10:3; Mk. 2:15.
2. Cullmann, The State, p. 24.
3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. Cullmann, Jesus and the Revolutionaries, pp. 9-10.
5. Cullmann, Salvation in History, p. 335.
6. Cullmann, The State, p. 43; see also p. 21; Jesus and the Revolutionaries, pp. 12, 45. It was Cullmann who pointed out that the Jewish theocratic ideal was expressly rejected in Jesus' temptation (Cullmann, The State, p. 14; Jesus and the Revolutionaries, p. 39). "The Gospel/...

As we continue to consider Ellul's theology of the state, we need to remember that when he expresses Christian beliefs concerning the state he is not offering an ethic for the state. What he says relates to a Christian understanding of the state and has ethical implications for Christians only. He is not taking back anything he has previously said concerning the duality between the Church and the world.[1]

The broader theological context for Ellul's view of the state has previously been discussed when we noted that he believes that Christ is the Lord of the world, who in a hidden way works creatively in the midst of human sin. In his study of II Kings[2] he argued that God is sovereignly active in man's political affairs, but that such sovereignty does not imply an endorsement of human conduct. Likewise,he sees the state as in many ways a sinful reality, but a sinful reality

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Gospel knows nothing of that confusion of the Kingdom of God with the State which is characteristic of the theocratic ideal of Judaism " (Cullmann, The State, p. 14).

1. "We cannot draw from the theological foundation of the State a valid ethic for that State. ... The functions of the state can be perfectly discerned from a human and sociological point of view, for example the necessity to maintain order and tranquillity, to defend the collectivity which is entrusted to it, to establish what men of its society call justice: but these tasks do not necessarily derive from the theological foundation. It could not be a question of imposing on a power which is ignorant of God a kind of morality or law coming from God" ("Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 155-6; see also False Presence, p. 199; "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 154,164).
One might object that Ellul has simply jumped from the New Testament situation to the modern one, without due attention to the "Christendom" era. In both of these former cases the secularity of society can be pretty much assumed, few Christians being in political leadership positions and society being basically hostile to Christianity. In the "Christendom" era in the West, society was at least nominally Christian, as were most politicians. Ellul, of course, is not unaware that Western society was at one time less hostile to Christianity than in the New Testament period or in modern times. However, he does not believe that politics was ever capable of the direct infusion of Christian "values".

2. The Politics of God.

used by God for His own purposes.

Ellul and Barth are of one mind at this point. Both men take seriously the present lordship of Christ over the world, which is powerfully proclaimed in the primitive Christian hymns.[1] Ellul explicitly agrees with Barth, that the sovereignty of God must be understood as the sovereignty of Christ. The God who rules the world is the God revealed in Jesus Christ and this God preserves the world for the sake of bringing men into covenant fellowship with Himself.[2] Though the state is necessarily secular, it has a God-appointed role which relates to the salvation of the world. Though the state can know nothing of its exalted purpose, Christians believe that that purpose is the preservation of a relative justice and order which allows for civil liberties[3] — which in turn permit the Church to

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1. Barth, Community, State and Church, pp. 111, 116-118, 156-7. We think that Ernst Käsemann is quite correct in arguing that the present lordship of Christ is the centre of gravity in Barth's position, rather than the theory of angelic powers standing behind earthly authorities (Käsemann, New Testament Questions, p. 205).

2. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 138; Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 77-78, 104; see above, pp. 149-152.

3. Reinhold Niebuhr has suggested that the Renaissance and the Reformation conceptions of liberty move on different levels, but are not as opposed to each other as the conceptions of life which underlie them (Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Vol. 2, p. 152). Interestingly enough, Ellul and Barth in fact combine both of these views of freedom. They see true freedom as involving the receipt of grace which begins to free man from himself and which leads to obedience. This biblical-Reformation understanding prevents freedom from becoming self-centred and destructive of the rights of others. Like the Renaissance understanding of freedom, they are also concerned that human beings be freed from inordinate social, political and religious restraints and controls (see ibid., p. 152). They very much defend civil liberty and they do so because they believe that the Church must have the freedom to preach the Gospel in word and deed.

When Ellul affirms that groups within society must have the freedom to embody autonomous values (The Political Illusion, pp. 206ff.), he in effect draws together both the Renaissance and the Reformation views on freedom. Because the Church must be free to be obedient to her Lord (Reformation view), she must defend the rights of all groups within society to embody their own values (Renaissance view). He believes that the right which the Church demands for herself must be granted to other groups as well.

Ellul's/...

preach the Gospel, that the world may come to faith in Christ.[1]

Thus Ellul insists that Christians

> can remind the state, that though it be secularized and its officials be atheists, it and they are nevertheless servants of the Lord. Whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not, they are servants of the Lord --- for the good. And they will have to render account to the Lord for the way they did their service.[2]

The Barthian understanding of the purpose of the state is different from the traditional Reformation view, in that the state is not seen to be founded merely on the negative necessity of preserving the sinful world from destruction. This task is seen to occur in the broader

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Ellul's understanding here is also the expression of his belief that man's response to the Gospel must be free. If the Church demanded rights not permitted other groups, she would be trying to force the Gospel upon people, rather than being content to witness. She would be using the state for coercive propaganda purposes.

1. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 143; Barth, Community, State and Church, p. 147.

2. Violence, pp. 159-160. Barth writes, "The State belongs to the order of redemption. ... It is pertinent to add that if we understand the State as an institution of the wisdom and patience of God and do not split up the work of God into various departments but see it as an undivided whole, we shall see the State strictly related to the mercy of God. It is God's intention to see that His mercy may have scope to unfold on earth. This is in fact the purpose of creation in general, to provide a theatrum gloriae suae (Calvin). In the sphere of nature there is intended to be an order of the grace of God, and this space is guaranteed by the State"(Barth, Against the Stream, p. 94). "However much human error and human tyranny may be involved in it, the State is not a product of sin but one of the constants of the divine Providence and government of the world in its action against human sin: it is therefore an instrument of divine grace. The civil community shares both a common origin and a common centre with the Christian community. It is an order of divine grace inasmuch as in relation to sinful man as such, in relation to the world that still needs redeeming, the grace of God is always the patience of God. ... It serves to protect man from the invasion of chaos and therefore to give him time: time for the preaching of the gospel; time for repentance; time for faith" (Barth, Community, State and Church, p. 156; see also p. 118). "The God from Whom all this concrete authority comes ... cannot be understood in a general way as Creator and Ruler, as was done in the expositions of the Reformers, and also by the more recent expositors up to and including Dehn and Schlier. When the New Testament speaks of the State, we are, fundamentally, in the Christological sphere; we are on a lower level than when it speaks of the Church, yet, in true accordance with its statements on the Church, we are in the same unique Christological sphere" (ibid., p. 120).

perspective of God's saving purpose for the world.[1]

We can agree with Barth and Ellul at this point. If the true purpose of God is revealed in Christ, then surely God preserves the world for the sake of the accomplishment of this purpose. It seems that the only way one could disagree with this argument is by rejecting the belief that Jesus Christ is the true revelation of God, for if He is the true revelation of God, He is surely the revelation of God's purpose in the creation of the world.

Having recognized the legitimacy of the Christian understanding of the state as ruled by Christ and hence related to God's purpose of salvation, we now go on to deal with the fact that Ellul claims to follow Barth and Cullmann[2] in their exegetical understanding of Rom. 13:1-7 (and parallel passages) as referring to both earthly "authorities" and angelic or demonic intermediary beings embodied in the political order.[3] In accepting this line of reasoning Ellul's

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1. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 143.

2. Violence, pp. 162-5.

3. "When Paul says that the 'archontes' crucified Jesus, the Lord of glory (I Cor. 2:8), he sees at the same time the invisible princes of this world and their tangible instruments, Herod and Pilate" ("Rappels et Réflexions", p. 139; see also p. 154). Ellul says that this double reference "explains the ambiguous character of the power of the state, agent of order and of disorder, of justice and injustice, of protection and of dictatorship. Correlatively, this is what explains very clearly the existence of two series of judgments on the state in the texts of the New Testament: at the same time the order willed by God, to which Christians must obey and the Beast of the Abyss, denounced by the Apocalypse" (ibid., p. 140). Arguing that the state does not have the right to declare itself a divine power, he says that this insight is brought out if we accept Cullmann's and Barth's theory about the exousai (ibid., p. 164; see also Barth, Community, State and Church, p. 114ff.; Cullmann, Christ and Time, pp. 191-210).

Just as it seems likely that Ellul accepts this theory because of its theological meaningfulness, rather than because technical exegetical considerations prove the point, so it seems likely that broader considerations of this kind motivated Barth and Cullmann. Both men were seeking a systematic New Testament doctrine of the state which would reconcile Rom. 13 (and parallel passages) with Rev. 13 (Barth, Against the Stream, p. 96; Community, State and Church, pp. 115-116; Cullmann, The State, pp. 55-6). (Similarly, Ellul/...

thought is not without ambiguity. If Rom. 13 is seen as not referring to the institutional state, but to individual authorities, then Rom. 13 is, as we have discussed earlier, simply inapplicable to the modern state. Conversely, Barth's and Cullmann's reasoning at this point is precisely a way of interpreting Rom. 13 as applicable to the modern state. Perhaps the ambiguity in Ellul's position is evidence that his real interest is less in the technical exegetical question of the double reference in Rom. 13 (though he affirms that) and more in the general theological necessity of a critical and yet appreciative attitude toward the state.

Since Rom. 13:3 reads so undialectically,[1] it seems unlikely that the word "authorities" really has the double reference which Barth, Cullmann and Ellul claim. We may entirely agree that Christians ought to have a critical as well as an appreciative attitude toward the state. We may even agree that there are biblical ways of defending this. However, this does not prove that Barth's and Cullmann's exegesis of the word "authorities" is correct. Many scholars are

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Ellul follows this theory largely because it makes sense of apparently divergent New Testament attitudes toward the state.) ("Rappels et Réflexions", p. 140). Behind Barth's and Cullmann's quest for a systematic New Testament doctrine of the state was the fact that the rise of Nazi totalitarianism painfully revealed the inadequacy of the Church's traditionally conservative attitude toward "the powers that be" (Barth, The Church and the Political Problem of our Day, pp. 38-39, 52, 55; Cullmann, Christ and Time, p. 203). They recognized the importance of a critical attitude toward the state, as embodied in Rev. 13, and thus sought ways to soften the traditional interpretation of Rom. 13.

Ellul agrees that the emergence of "the antichristian totalitarian state in a secularized society" was the existential context from which Barth and Cullmann discovered their new interpretation of the state ("Rappels et Réflexions", p. 138). He by implication agrees that this political development is important and necessitates a rethinking of Church tradition concerning the political order. This is not to say that a new doctrine of the state can be based on historical necessity or non-biblical factors. It is to say that historical developments can sometimes legitimately lead Christians to look deeper into the biblical sources, to find aspects of tradition long overlooked.

1. "Rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad." Ernest Best/...

unconvinced of the accuracy of such an exegetical interpretation[1] and even Cullmann admits that his exegetical interpretation can't be proven.[2] We think it unwise to base Christian doctrine on such a debatable exegetical issue, especially when the basic point can be made in other ways.

Those who argue against Barth's and Cullmann's exegesis may be right that in Rom. 13 and parallel texts the state is seen simply as a dyke against sin, a part of God's benevolent protection against chaos. The optimistic assumption of 13:3 seems to be based on some such notion. Even if Barth's and Cullmann's critics are exegetically correct in their rejection of, or agnosticism concerning the double reference in Rom. 13, we still think that in a broader perspective Barth, Cullmann and Ellul are theologically justified in insisting that the state is morally ambiguous. It seems that in fact the demonic has always to some degree invaded the state. Surely no state has ever been as morally correct as Rom. 13:3 implies.

For good theological reasons, one might entirely agree that Christians must have this double attitude toward the state, remaining critical, because Christ's lordship is over a rebellious world, being appreciative, because God uses the state to permit the preaching of the Gospel. One can claim even more than this general biblical understanding of God's sovereignty to back up this double attitude. If Rom. 13 seems to favour a one-sidedly appreciative attitude toward the

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Best writes of a parallel passage (I Pet. 2:13-17), "The case is not considered where Christians may have to be disobedient because the law makes demands contrary to Christian faith, e.g. the burning of incense to express allegiance to the emperor..." (Ernest Best, I Peter, p. 115).

1. See Morrison, The Powers That Be; C.K. Barrett, A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (1957), pp. 243ff.; G.B. Caird, Revelation, pp. 162ff.

2. Cullmann, The State, p. 83.

state, the broader context of Paul's theology opens up the possibility of a critical response. C.K. Barrett points out that if (according to Rom. 13) Christians are said to owe obedience to the state, in terms of Paul's general theology this obedience can be no more absolute than the subordination of a wife to her husband (Col. 3:18). Just as, on Paul's terms, a wife could not obey her husband were he to order her to commit murder, so Christian obedience to the state must not conflict with obedience to God.[1] Also, one can set Rom. 13 (and parallel texts) in polar tension with Rev. 13. Such a procedure is perfectly legitimate if one believes, as Ellul does,[2] that the Word of God can speak amid the conversation provided by diverse texts. One might argue that both Rom. 13 and Rev. 13 are oversimplifications, yet that together they represent the truth.

Reinhold Niebuhr makes a similar move. He tells us that the Bible contains two attitudes toward the state and that both of these attitudes must be held in balance if we are to do justice to the moral ambiguity of government. According to the first approach, government is an ordinance of God reflecting divine authority. Niebuhr sees St. Paul as representing this understanding. The other approach he sees represented by the Old Testament prophetic tradition. He says that in the prophetic tradition rulers and judges were seen to be particularly subject to God's judgment, because they so often deified God's majesty by oppressing the poor.[3]

> These two approaches do justice to the two aspects of government. It is a principle of order and its power prevents anarchy; but its power is not identical with divine power. It is wielded from a partial and particular locus and it cannot achieve the perfect union of goodness and power which characterize divine order.[4]

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1. C.K. Barrett, New Testament Essays, p. 16.
2. The Meaning of the City, pp. xvii-xviii.
3. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Part 2, pp. 269-270.
4. Ibid., p. 269.

Niebuhr opposes those Christians who isolate either of these two traditions. He considers both traditions to be inadequate when taken separately. For example, he criticizes what he takes to be Paul's very undialectical appreciation of the state in Rom. 13. He believes that Paul could make his unqualified endorsement of government only by mistakenly assuming that government is no peril to virtue but only to vice (Rom. 13:3). He recognizes that Paul was writing in a particular context, but even so, Niebuhr thinks that history proves that the power of government is morally ambiguous. Even the best of governments imperil good works.[1] He agrees with the later Calvinists who came to see that government has a covenant with God to establish justice and in the absence of this fulfilment government must be subjected to criticism.[2]

Whether or not Ellul, Barth and Cullmann are right in all of their exegesis concerning the state, they are surely right in their insistence that Christians should have a double attitude toward the state.[3]

Ellul tells us that the biblical perspective

> sees the state as ordained by God, in harmony with the divine order, and at the same time as the Beast of the Abyss, the Great Babylon; as the wielder of the sword to chastise the wicked and to protect the good, but also as the source of persecution and injustice.[4]

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1. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man, Part 2, p. 270.
2. Ibid., pp. 282-3.
3. Ellul says that a dual attitude toward human law is called for, corresponding to the dual attitude Christians should have toward the state. On the one hand, Christians should oppose anarchy and the violence of disorder, remembering that God has appropriated human law and that Christ is the Lord of the world. On the other hand, Christians should rigorously test and evaluate the law, in order that it may become a true reflection of justice, remembering that Christ is the judge of the world and the judge of human law (Theological Foundation of Law, p. 100).
4. Violence, p. 2.

In a general way he is surely right that the demonic does incarnate itself in historical institutions — including the state.[1] Because this is so, Christians have a double responsibility, to "obey and to resist" government, and these do not contradict each other.[2] Ellul, however, puts most of his emphasis on the limitations imposed on the state, which flow from Rev. 13 and similar passages. He believes that the omnicompetent state, the state claiming to be able to do everything, stands condemned by Scripture as the demonic state, the state to which Christians must offer non-violent resistance.[3] Our point here is that such resistance is encouraged by the recognition of the ambiguous character of the state. If God accomplishes His purposes in and through the state, this does not mean an endorsement of the idolatrous policies of the state, any more than the belief in Christ's sovereignty means automatic endorsement of the ways of the world.

Karl Barth's understanding of government is likewise well balanced[4] and is of value whether or not one accepts his controversial interpretation of Rom. 13. Barth reminds us that one and the same state is

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1. Violence, pp. 162-5. "When one approaches phenomena like the state, money, sexuality, law from another angle, one arrives at the idea that behind these phenomena there is something that cannot be reduced to rational terms, something that suggests a deeper existence and is not altogether explicable on the human level" (ibid., p. 163). Referring to demonic powers Ellul writes, "The state would be powerless and unimportant were it not for the something-more-than-itself that resides within it ..." (ibid., p. 164).

2. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 179.

3. Ibid., pp. 167-168.

4. Some people doubt whether Barth himself retained this balance in practice. They think that in practice he simply moved from being radically critical of the state to being totally accepting of it (Charles C. West, Communism and the Theologians, pp. 257ff.). Insofar as this is the case, the application of Barth's theology of the state may have been all too dependent on his own political inclination.

described in the New Testament as a divine institution (Rom. 13) and as a beast from the abyss (Rev. 13). He concludes, in a way very similar to Reinhold Niebuhr, that these are the two poles between which we are to understand and criticize every state.[1] "In fact we shall never see the state either in its pure form as the ordinance of God or in its entirely diabolical perversion. These two poles are the frontiers between which reality moves ..."[2] He does insist that we must reckon first with Rom. 13 and then with Rev. 13.[3] He argues that it is not at all inevitable that the state become totally demonized, like the state described in Rev. 13. He even argues that recent political events have introduced an unnecessary pessimism into New Testament exegesis at this point. Yet he believes that every state has some kinship with the beast of Rev. 13.[4]

Barth's understanding encourages a constructively critical approach to the state. "Christians will never be the easiest citizens for any government ... But they will never be able to take the line of sterile negation."[5] He writes, "I am no loyalist and am perfectly prepared to slam the table. But the occasion must be quite clear."[6] Barth does not lose his critical stance toward government, though he emphasizes the priority of Rom. 13. He tells us, "Jesus would, in actual fact, have been an enemy of the state if he had not dared, quite calmly to call King Herod a 'fox' (Lk. 13:32). If the State has perverted its God-given authority, it cannot be honored better

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1. Barth, Against the Stream, p. 96.
2. Ibid., pp. 96-97.
3. Ibid., p. 96.
4. Barth, Community, State and Church, pp. 118-119.
5. Barth, Against the Stream, p. 82.
6. Ibid., p. 98.

than by this criticism which is due it in all circumstances."[1] It is Barth's emphasis on Christ's lordship in and over every state which prevents him from adopting a purely negative attitude toward government.

Like Barth, Cullmann encourages a double attitude toward the state. He insists that it is not divine, but that it has a dignity because it preserves an order willed by God. The Christian is thus to affirm the importance of the state, but is to be critical of it insofar as it oversteps its role and makes totalitarian claims. Cullmann quite rightly argues that though Paul does not deal with the situation in which the state makes divine claims, Paul would have resisted a state which asked man to confess "'Caesar is Lord' and '<u>Anathama Jesous</u>'".[2] He writes of the state, "According as it remains within its limits or transgresses them, the Christian will describe it as the servant of God or the instrument of the Devil."[3] Cullmann's words in the following statement are in fact an excellent summary of Ellul's understanding of the Christian attitude toward the state:-

> The Church's task with regard to the State, which is posed for all time, is thus clear. First, it must loyally give the State everything necessary to its existence. It has to oppose anarchy and all Zealotism within its own ranks. Second, it has to fulfil the office of watchman over the State. That means: it must remain in principle critical toward <u>every</u> State and be ready to warn it against transgression of its legitimate limits. Third, it must deny to the State which exceeds its limits whatever such a State demands that lies within the province of religio-ideological excess; and in its preaching the Church must courageously describe this excess as opposition to God.[4]

We now turn from Ellul's biblical exposition of the relativity of politics to consider his view of the <u>modern meaning</u> of this

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1. Barth, <u>Community, State and Church</u>, p. 139.
2. Cullmann, <u>The State</u>, p. 52.
3. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 66.
4. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 69.

Christian belief and attitude. We are still dealing with the Christian response to politization, but the emphasis is now less on the exegetical basis and more on modern application.

Modern politization leads to a confidence that the centralized state can provide "solutions" to life's most important problems. In the light of the biblical relativizing of the political order, Ellul challenges this very assumption. He insists that genuine political problems are by definition incapable of solution; at most, all that can be attained is a tolerable balance between conflicting claims.[1] He criticizes the myth of "solutions" not only because he believes it is false, but also because he thinks that it eliminates "from our conscience the sense of the relative, i.e., limited nature of all true political effort."[2] He admits that "politics can solve administrative problems, problems concerning the material development of a city, or general problems of economic organization — which is a considerable accomplishment."[3] He thinks that politics absolutely cannot deal with man's personal problems, such as the issue of good and evil, nor can it determine the meaning of life, nor the responsibilities of freedom.[4] He thinks that individuals often abandon direct political responsibility because they expect the state to offer "solutions" for problems that they themselves should be attempting to solve.[5]

Ellul argues that political choice is generally a merely human issue and that the Christian revelation concerning politics does not supply political answers, but treats the whole area as relative and

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1. The Political Illusion, p. 190; "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 173.
2. The Political Illusion, p. 190.
3. Ibid., p. 186.
4. Ibid., p. 186.
5. Ibid., pp. 187-190.

secondary. Since Christians are to regard politics as a problem area, they are not to overestimate the importance of political decisions, nor to idealize political regimes.[1] Very typically he writes that "All points of view have their motives of justice and their burdens of injustice."[2] He thinks that guilt is generally involved no matter what political decision is taken.[3] Because he understands politics

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1. False Presence, p. 150.

2. Ibid., p. 151. Ellul shares with Reinhold Niebuhr and F.J. Leenhardt the belief that politics is a relative and problematical area. (He cites his agreement with Leenhardt ["Rappels et Réflexions", p. 149] and refers to Niebuhr's Moral Man and Immoral Society [To Will and To Do, p. 278].) He writes, "Democratic behavior presupposes that a man knows that opinions are unstable, that a pure system cannot be attained, that justice cannot be had in politics, and that he therefore admits the relatively limited scope of all political debate. To admit the relativity will prevent people from becoming agitated to the point of delirium as they become nowadays" (The Political Illusion, pp. 202-203). In a similar vein Reinhold Niebuhr wrote, "Democracy is a method of finding proximate solutions for insoluble problems" (Reinhold Niebuhr, The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness, p. 118).
   Ellul offers a corrective to Barth's "crisis" thought concerning political reality (see Barth, Against the Stream, pp. 152-4; Table Talk, p. 82). By Barth's crisis thought we mean his tendency to oversimplify political decision-making by assuming that God's will is usually identifiable with one side of complex political questions, his tendency to see relative political decisions as representing ultimate decisions of faith. (He does qualify slightly his own crisis thought, by defending the Church's right to remain silent if that seems to be God's will) (Barth, Against the Stream, pp. 92, 114). Ellul's difference is in part that he stresses to a far greater degree the difficulty involved in gaining full and accurate information on which to make political decisions (A Critique, p. 105). In Propaganda he describes the near impossibility of attaining accurate information on social and political matters. (The newspapers are not the accurate source of information which Barth assumed!) What makes political decisions so ambiguous is in part the fact that technical questions must always be thought through and the availability of information, its adequacy and the difficulty of interpreting it are always problematical factors.
   Ellul differs from Barth in stressing to a greater degree the autonomous nature of political reality. (He speaks of a "dual morality" and Barth, still somewhat in the "Social Gospel" tradition, speaks of an "analogy of faith"). Ellul simply does not believe that any political choices offer Christian alternatives and hence he thinks that Christians should be very reluctant to identify God's will with one side of a highly debatable political issue (as did Barth concerning German re-armament).

3. "The only thing that counts in the end is the suffering of the people involved in these conflicts. That suffering is strikingly shared/...

as a relative area, he insists that Christians can never take part in a "final struggle", nor accept the demand for a sacrifice of life. "For example, we never have the right to participate in meetings or movements which ask the execution or the massacre of the worst political enemies, because nothing decisive or final is ever involved, or gained, or risked in politics."[1]

In keeping with his view of the relativity of politics and its inability to offer solutions, Ellul believes that Christians ought to seek to help calm political passions and introduce cool rationality into heated political controversy. As a part of this task he thinks that they ought to help people on differing sides of political issues to understand one another.[2] Such a mediatorial role, of course, would be impossible for those whose ultimate commitment is to a particular political programme or ideology. The "otherness" of the Church in relationship to all political options thus points to a unique political contribution which the Church alone can make.

Even within the Church's own common life she can and should live out her understanding of the relativity of politics by being a forum for open, free and relaxed political discussion.[3] Ellul thinks that

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shared on all sides. I cannot resign myself to the humiliation, the subjugation and the economic misery of the Muslims under French domination, but neither can I resign myself to the massacre of Europeans, Jews and harkis, or to their being dispossessed of their goods and torn from what was for them a fatherland" (False Presence, p. 151). He does not mean to imply that there are not important differences of degree between various political alternatives. He only insists that all such differences are only relative and hence politics should not be turned into an ultimate value (ibid., p. 152). On both of these points Ellul's thought is in line with Reinhold Niebuhr's.

1. Ibid., p. 150. Ellul differs from Reinhold Niebuhr in using the relativity of politics to invalidate Christian participation in violence. The deeper reason for the difference turns on the issue of Christian perfectionism.

2. Ibid., pp. 97-8, 192-3.

3. The Politics of God, p. 13.

the Church should seldom take public stands on political issues, though individual Christians should be free to do so, if they do not identify their opinions with Christian truth.[1] However, members of the Church can and should discuss political issues (rather than preaching on them). Christians can feel free to do so — if it is recognized that the stakes are not high and that Christians of equal commitment to Christ may disagree widely on particular political issues.

Because of his Christocentric focus, Ellul believes that Christians have a unity of faith, in spite of their differences on many human issues, politics included. Instead of dividing the Church by a call to political orthodoxy of one sort or another, he believes that Christians should recognize that what they have in common (their faith in Christ) is all-important. This being so, Christians ought not to worry about political diversity among themselves.[2]

> This means, first of all, that whenever we join a party we should always be spiritually and humanly closer, more bound, more friendly, more trusting and more open with respect to our brothers in the Church, even if they be sometimes of a different opinion politically, than we are with respect to our fellow party-members. Reconciliation does not mean reuniting with those who have the same opinions we have.[3]

Since Christians share a common loyalty to Christ, they should not be defensive or provincial about the viewpoints of the political groups to which they belong.[4] Instead, they should provide a

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1. "The Church can make no valid judgment in politics, ... she can only open an area of questioning. Apart from the most rare and exceptional instances, she cannot take sides" (False Presence, pp. 120-1; see below, p. 317, n. 1). Ellul does not here absolutely prohibit the Church from taking stands on political issues; he simply thinks that it should not do so frequently, precisely because it is seldom so obvious that a particular political decision is unequivocably preferable from the Christian perspective.

2. Ibid., p. 190.

3. Ibid., pp. 190-1.

4. One reason why Christians should introduce understanding among those of diverse political views is because Christians are called to love their enemies and to introduce this transcendent perspective. "To/...

critical presence.[1] In Ellul's view it is less important whether a Christian is a Republican or a Democrat, a Tory or a Socialist, and more important that he offer a critical presence in the group to which he belongs. This applies also to the membership of Christians in unions, corporations, universities, etc. By being critically present, by pointing out alternative views on particular issues, Christians provide a reconciling presence in the world.[2] Ellul admits that it is

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"To be reconciled is well and good, but with whom, if not with the person who is our enemy? The man of the right has no problem being reconciled with the army, nor the man of the left with the FLN. The capitalist has no trouble reconciling himself with the bourgeoisie, nor the union leader with the working man, but that is not reconciliation!" (False Presence, pp. 197-8).

1. "It would be ... a dialogue within each group through the medium of Christians in each of the opposing groups, who are deeply united among themselves because they are first of all in the Church" (ibid., pp. 196-7). Ellul is not saying that political differences are simply matters of no importance. For example, he believes that from a human perspective socialism is preferable to capitalism. However, he is not prepared to preach his human preference as true Christian doctrine. He recognizes that aspects of socialism are offensive to Christianity and that legitimate Christian arguments can be used in support of other forms of government. He writes, "I absolutely do not say that capitalism is better than socialism. I firmly believe the contrary. I absolutely do not say that defense of the poor through socialist movements is wrong. I firmly believe the contrary. I want only to show what a mistake it is to confuse Christianity and socialism; they are not the same. A while ago, people made the monumental error of saying that democracy, liberalism, competitive capitalism were all expressions of Christianity. Today they make the same monumental error for the benefit of socialism" (Violence, p. 32; see also p. 68).

2. False Presence, pp. 195-6; Violence, pp. 45-6, 142. "It is good that there should be Christians active in the various parties, even the communist party or the OAS if need be, since that can be an occasion for demonstrating to the world that faith in the same Saviour infinitely transcends those differences, and that Christians of opposite parties, or of enemy nations, are first and foremost brothers in Christ and completely understand one another spiritually and humanly. If such is not the case, then involvement in a party has nothing to do with the ministry of reconciliation. You cannot pretend to reconcile others if you are not reconciled among yourselves" (False Presence, p. 191). "We are not going to act like 'true believers,' absolutizing the doctrines of our party or of our business. On the contrary, we shall try within our group to be interpreters for others. Just as at the personal level we have to take into account the interests of others, so likewise we should try to give those in our own group an insight into the point of view of others. ... Thus it will not be a matter of reinforcing our party positions, of supplying new arguments/...

difficult to carry out this task and that Christians will be accused of being traitors.[1] This, however, should not distract them from

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arguments and new ways to win. It will rather be a matter of humanizing situations, of playing the role of advocates for the opposition, of being interpreters for all" (False Presence, p. 196).

Ellul's position relates to his convictions about the concrete and flexible nature of obedience to God. He writes, "There are no Christian political and social principles, defined in an abstract way" (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 53). "Thus it is not necessary to be loyal to an idea, to a doctrine, to a political movement. What is called 'fidelity' in the language of the world is too often only habit or obstinacy. The Christian may belong to the Right or to the Left, he may be a Liberal or a Socialist, according to the times in which he lives, and according as the position of the one or the other seems to him more in harmony with the will of God at that particular time. These attitudes are contradictory, it is true, from a human point of view, but their unity consists in the search for the coming Kingdom" (ibid., p. 54).

Barth also had an understanding of Christian political involvement as extremely flexible (likewise based on his belief in the living God). (Of course, his assumption about the Church herself taking political stands is different.) He writes, "The Word of God is not tied to any political system, old or new. It justifies and judges all of them. It passes through, because it is superior to, all political change. It is neither old nor new, but eternal. The Christian Church must be guided by the Word of God and by it alone. ... It must not forget for an instant that all political systems, right and left alike, are the work of men. ... It must not sell this birthright for any conservative or revolutionary mess of pottage" (Barth, Against the Stream, pp. 86-7). "Only in the rarest cases will its [the Church's] position be the same today as it was fifty or even ten years ago ... It cannot have a 'program' because it has a living Master whom it has to serve in the most varied circumstances and situations ... Christian politics are always bound to seem strange, incalculable and surprising in the eyes of the world — otherwise they would not be Christian" (ibid., pp. 91-2). "The Church must not concern itself eternally with various 'isms' and systems, but with historical realities as seen in the light of the Word of God and of the Faith. [It is debatable whether Barth's words here are consistent with his later use of the "analogy of faith" to defend the seemingly timeless preferability of democratic socialism.] Its obligations lie ... towards its living Lord. Therefore, the Church never thinks, speaks or acts 'on principle'. Rather it judges spiritually and by individual cases. For that reason it rejects every attempt to systematise political history and its own part in that history. Therefore, it preserves the freedom to judge each new event afresh. If yesterday it travelled along one path, it is not bound to keep to the same path today. If yesterday it spoke from its position of responsibility, then today it should be silent if in this position it considers silence to be the better course" (ibid., p. 114). Thomas C. Oden's statement about Barth's thought applies to Ellul's as well. "In Barth we have a strongly historical conception of Christian political action, one which is concretely responsive to occurring history instead of some overarching law or political principle"(Thomas C. Oden, The Promise of Barth, p. 33; see above, p. 102 and fn.).

1. False Presence, p. 196.

their course, since the Christian life by definition involves suffering.

In keeping with what we have described as Ellul's perfectionism, he says that one specific aspect of the Christian's critical presence in various groups should be his insistence on the importance of the means used.[1] Another specific feature of the Christian's critical presence should be his willingness to witness to the ties which he has with fellow Christians, even if they be political opponents.[2]

One may wonder whether Ellul has not involved himself in a contradiction. Having stressed the point that Christian participation in politics is not imperative, he goes on to speak of a unique task for Christians within diverse political groupings. Actually, he has not contradicted himself here. Though the recommendations he has just given apply to Christians within such groups, he is not saying that all Christians must be within political groups. All he is saying is that if Christians do think that they as individuals should be politically active, their Christianity should have the effect of freeing them from sacralizing the ideas of the political groups to which they belong.[3]

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1. "We should make known our objections of conscience against methods of aggressiveness which appeal to hate and contempt, and which pass summary and inaccurate judgments; or again, against methods of bribery and blackmail, against the use of pressure by powerful interests, etc. That also constitutes part of our ministry of reconciliation" (False Presence, p. 197).

2. Ibid., p. 191.

3. Ellul denies that Christians must be involved in political affairs ("Rappels et Réflexions", p. 161), but admits that they may be involved, if they are duly aware of the dangers involved (False Presence, pp. 102, 112, 114, 176-177). "I do not agree that the individual cannot fulfill himself except by political endeavor or that politics expresses his personality, i.e., that man does not become himself except by political commitment, that not to participate in politics is to be a person without substance. Man may eventually participate in politics, but on condition that he knows exactly what he is doing. If a man does not maintain a distance — an objectivity — his very person will be absorbed by politics and dissolved in the sphere of political autonomy" (The Political Illusion, p. 95). "But when we speak of commitment on behalf of man, we are not thinking necessarily of political involvement, or of social reform, or of revolution. That/...

Another implication of Ellul's relativizing of the political order is that he thinks that Christians must not support nationalism, the glorification of the nation as sacred.[1] He criticizes "the frantic trembling" exhibited when "the political sacrament — the flag, the chief, the slogan — comes near us."[2] He bemoans the fact that most Christians seem to feel more bound to their nation than to the Church. As evidence of this nationalism, he refers to the fact that Christians will make sacrifices for the state which they will not make for the Church:[3]

> Who would agree to pay the Church a subscription equal to what he pays in taxes? Who would agree to devote a year, two years, or three years of his life to the service of Christ, as he does to his term in the Army? But, even if we do not go as far as that, we find church members rubbing along quite happily with the cleavage in the Body of Christ; we write even on the highest official level, "Reformed Church of France," whereas the Church may in fact be in France, but can only be of Jesus Christ.[4]

That is not impossible, but in spite of our current obsession with politics and social justice, it is not the most important feature. As a by-product, on occasion, for this or that person, that path is good, but it is not the truth and the life. To the contrary, it is sometimes falsehood and death" (Prayer, p. 165). He thinks that Christian participation in politics should be an act of freedom, with the genuine possibility of not participating. He writes, "We are not in politics. It is there to get into, to lend ourselves to, as a pure act of will, as an outright decision, with the freedom not to do so or to do so, with a will born of independent thinking, with the concern to do something special in it, instead of merging with the crowd, with 'the people'" (False Presence, p. 183).

Ellul is quite aware that many people today claim to be politically neutral, when in fact they are supporters of the status quo! He agrees with what a humorist said of the apoliticism of the Fifth Republic: "'According to the government, an association or a group is apolitical when it actively pursues the government's policies'" (The Political Illusion, p. 201).

1. False Presence, p. 204; A Critique, pp. 220-225; "Les Facteurs Non Théologiques de Division entre les Eglises de France" (September-October 1952), Foi et Vie, p. 418.
2. The Political Illusion, p. 20.
3. "On the Cultural and Social Factors", p. 274.
4. Ibid., p. 274.

He believes that Christians must learn

> that they belong to Christ before their country, that everything is God's and must be rendered unto Him, that only after this total gift has been made have they the right to render anything to Caesar. They must learn that a French Christian is, because he is a Christian first and foremost, more closely linked to a German Christian than to a French non-Christian. It is absolutely vital to create in this way an international Christian attitude of mind.[1]

Though Ellul sees the importance of the political order and thus is no anarchist, he entirely opposes the combining of a Caesar worship with evangelical Christianity.[2]

Because Ellul relativizes the state, he thinks that the only biblically acceptable form of the state is the limited or secular state. (Of course, he is under no illusion that the state will naturally be a secular one. He believes that it is one of the Church's tasks to ensure that it understands itself in this way.) First, the secular state is independent of the Church, neither the Church's slave, nor seeking to enslave the Church.[3] Secondly, the secular state recognizes its own incompetence to judge theological truth. It is not to proclaim the Church's Gospel nor to give the Church a favourable position.[4] He writes:-

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1. "On the Cultural and Social Factors", p. 274.

2. Robert A. Nisbet quite correctly writes that Ellul recognizes that in our world, human beings could not fend for themselves long "without a fairly substantial degree of political organization. ... It is not reform, much less a kind of anarchist revolution, that Ellul seeks. It is, if I interpret him correctly, a withholding of some vital part of one's self from the presently consuming logic and rhetoric of politics" (Robert A. Nisbet, "The Grand Illusion", Commentary 50, No. 2 (August 1970), p. 42).

3. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 169-170. "The Church must not attempt to establish herself by the state's support nor to use the state to spread the Gospel, nor use the state's force, nor live from the state's financial assistance, nor attempt to 'christianize' the state, nor try to reconcile the work of the church and state, nor try to derive from the state a privileged position, with reference to other spiritual movements" (ibid., p. 170).

4. Ellul thinks that it is a good thing that the Church is no longer in a position to run society; he regards the Constantinian approach as one bought at the price of the Church's loss of her autonomy in relationship/...

> If we must not impose our Christian truth on it, we must at the same time refuse that it choose another truth. The state's order is not that of truth. It is not instituted by God in order to decide what is the truth. It must therefore hold an equal balance between all the tendencies and orientations.[1]

Thirdly, it is not enough that the state not choose one truth over another. It must also not proclaim itself as the true religion.[2] The secular state refrains from creating a secular religion of the state. Ellul insists that Christ's defeat of the exousiai means that the authority of the state is despoiled of its religious character.[3] A state stripped of ideological pretence, a state which does not claim to be all-powerful, is a state which is content "to administer the things of man", a secular state.[4]

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relationship to the state (False Presence, p. 8). He believes that it was an effect of the Reformation that the synthesis between the Church and the world was broken down (Protestantisme Français, p. 147). He says that Calvin believed that the state was not to interfere in the Church's affairs. In this sense Calvin saw the state as limited and separated from the Church ("Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 133-4).

1. Ibid., p. 171.
2. Ibid., pp. 172-3; False Presence, p. 200.
3. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 172.
4. Ibid., p. 173. Ellul's advocacy of a secular society is very similar to D.L. Munby's position. Both men agree that the state should remain neutral with reference tc particular religions, should not commit itself to a particular theological view of the world, should accept a pluralism of behaviour and should be a tolerant society (D.L.Munby, The Idea of a Secular Society and its Significance for Christians (1963), pp. 9-35). In words reflective of Ellul's own recognition of the duality between the Church and the world, Munby writes, "It is one thing to hold a high view of Christian marriage; it is another to insist that this should be the law of the land" (ibid., p. 22). Of the secular society he writes in words reminiscent of Ellul's criticism of the omnicompetent state: "The liberal secular society, by contrast with most previous societies, does not set itself an overall aim, other than that of assisting as fully as possible the actual aims of its members, and making these as concordant with each other as possible" (ibid., p. 27). Behind his position, as behind Ellul's, is a respect for the autonomy of various groups in society: "The positive ideals that lie behind the idea of a secular society are firstly a deep respect for the individual man and the small group of which society is made up" (ibid., p. 33). We think that a significant difference between the two men is that Munby seems to think that modern society naturally tends toward the ideal just enunciated; Ellul thinks that modern society tends/...

Ellul believes that because the state's natural tendency is to sacralize itself (a tendency corresponding to the exousiai's effort to resume authority),[1] the Church must seek to limit this tendency by providing true dialogue. Dialogue does not mean that the Church always calls the state into question,[2] but that the Church insists that she has something unique to say to the world which the world cannot say to itself.[3] The Church's social relevance relates to her duty to manifest an otherness, which the state itself needs for the sake of preserving its own relative character.[4]

We have saved one statement until last, because we believe that it represents the essence of Ellul's view concerning the relativity of the political order. What he says here is based in the final analysis on the Christian relativizing of all things human. He writes:-

> It is up to Christians to relativize social, political and economic activities, by the use of a sense of humor, for example. They should avoid the language of exaggeration, of melodrama, of excessive indignation, approaches found so frequently in all the political articles by Christians. Rather it is a matter, in great friendliness toward the people who are implicated in these activities, of

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tends to sacralize itself and must be brought back to the above ideal through the witness of autonomous groups reminding the state of its relativity.

1. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 174.

2. "This dialogue which conveys the warning can both turn to the approval of the state's work (which is not at all excluded) and to direct attack when the state makes itself God" (ibid., p. 178).

3. Ibid., p. 175. "This dialogue, on the other hand, is not a relation of conflict nor of collaboration: it is a relation of tension, because the two partners are truly different ... The State acts by the sword, force, violence; the church speaks of love and justice. Understand well that this tension can be truly dialectical and will be a fruitful source of political action itself. ... There is not any true political life outside of this tension, because it is that which can preserve the state from closing in on itself" (ibid., p. 176; False Presence, p. 179).

4. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 174. He is not saying that the Church is the only limiting factor helping the state to recognize its relativity (ibid., p. 174). In a general way he can speak of the formation of groups with autonomous values, which help to accomplish this same goal (The Political Illusion, pp. 206ff.; see below, pp. 310-315).

> helping them understand that the life is worth more than food and the body than clothing, and that in the end all political, economic or social forms, all institutions, all patriotic activity, all resistance movements, all conquests, all liberations, all sociological structures and all businesses are mere clothing. In the last analysis they never attain to life.[1]

Had Ellul done nothing more than to argue in favour of the relativity of politics, his contribution to Christian thinking about politics would still be immense. He is surely correct that there is a great deal of politicized thinking and action in the world, and certainly this is having unfortunate effects on the Church. Whether or not the Church is politicized to the degree that he imagines, it is no doubt true that there is much misguided enthusiasm for politics in the Church which borders on the sacralizing of political decisions and political affairs in general. He has put his finger on one area where the world has invaded and influenced the Church to the detriment of her own faith. He is surely right that except in rare cases, political decisions are not of such a nature as to demand a call for an absolute either-or decision of faith. Secular political issues seldom confront Christians with alternatives which can be identified simply with Christian truth. Even which side is preferable from a Christian perspective is usually a highly debatable matter, since there are often legitimate Christian considerations both represented and denied on various sides.[2]

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1. False Presence, pp. 210-211.

2. When one thinks in terms of general ideas or values, it is easier for Christians to reach agreement. For example, whether or not Christians should favour racial integration is a doctrinal issue. The normative answer can be determined on the basis of exegetical and theological considerations. Though unfortunately it must be admitted that many Christians have racist attitudes, we think that there are convincing arguments which show that such attitudes are inconsistent with faith in Christ. When one moves from the consideration of general values and ideas, to an assessment of available political options, the discussion becomes much more relative. Though particular legislation or particular candidates may seem to favour racial justice to a greater or lesser degree than other positions or candidates, this is seldom capable of Christian proof. Of course, explicitly racist policies and politicians can and should be/...

Even if the political opinions of Christians are not changed, what Ellul says could have the effect of teaching Christians of diverse political viewpoints to discuss the issues in a spirit of love and understanding. His thought could have the effect of helping to lower the temperature of much Christian political discussion and could encourage Christians of diverse political persuasions to be more careful about distinguishing between their own relative human opinions, and what can and must be preached as pure doctrine.[1] If the dividing line between human opinion and Christian belief sometimes cannot be defined with absolute certainty, it nevertheless is important to attempt to see the distinction and to attempt to apply it, lest the Christian faith be tossed to and fro by every change of political opinion.

The Autonomous Nature of Politics and a Christian Response

As a consistent aspect of his understanding of the duality between the Church and the world, Ellul stresses the fact that politics is autonomous, having no connection with the way of life which flows from faith in Christ. He even extends his argument by saying that politics has no relationship even to human values. (With this extension of his argument we think he has overstated his case.)[2]

As we turn to examine Ellul's analysis of the autonomous nature of politics, we notice that his convictions relate to his study of the

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be rejected, but this only serves to narrow the field of choice. It does not in most cases render an unequivocal Christian decision. (The issue becomes even more complicated when legitimate goals of one sort collide with legitimate goals of another and when these collide at the level of concrete political alternatives. Ellul thinks political issues are of this nature, thus incapable of true "solution".)

1. Paul drew such a distinction. He wrote, "Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion ..." (I Cor. 7:25). Some of us are quite happy that Paul had the wisdom to recognize the relativity of his view at this point!

2. Ellul elsewhere contradicts this point by saying that politics does have to do with human morality (see below, pp. 302 et seq., n. 4).

Old Testament, II Kings in particular. Of II Kings he writes, "In fact these texts show the relativity of politics, which is the sphere of the greatest affirmation of man's autonomy, of his revolt, of his pretentious attempt to play the role of God."[1] If ever a state were capable of operating on the basis of theological and religious ideals, it would have been the theocratic state of Israel in the Old Testament. Yet Ellul's exegetical study uncovers the fact that Israel's kings made their decisions on the basis of human reasoning and prudence. He thinks that what the Old Testament reveals about politics is realism not idealism. The fact that God was able to accomplish His purposes in and through various political dealings, based on human prudence, should not be confused with the notion that high ideals (even high human ideals) were applied to the political order.[2] If the state in the Old Testament were in the final analysis autonomous, this is true even more of the modern "secular" state. On the basis of such reasoning he reaches the conclusion that "The Church never has to formulate a commandment of God in relation to political power, which in principle cannot recognize God as the true God. It has never to say to the state: This must be done."[3]

From his sociological analysis of modern political reality, he finds verification for his biblical argument. Not only is modern politics seen to be autonomous in the face of Christian "values", but also in relationship to human values as well.[4]

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1. The Politics of God , p. 14; see also p. 146; False Presence, p. 180.

2. The Politics of God, pp. 65-66.

3. Ibid., p. 85; see also Violence, p. 159.

4. The Political Illusion, pp. 86-7. In Ellul's earlier thought he did not see the state as so entirely devoid of human values (Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 123-124, 126). His social and political cynicism has increased over the years.

Related to Ellul's argument that modern politics is divorced from even human values, is his belief that what legitimizes a state in the eyes of other states is not its morality, but its capacity to stay in power.[1] Characteristically he writes, "'The modern state is a power group of institutional character seeking to monopolize force within the limits of a territory ...'"[2]

He also thinks that politics today has to do only with the values of efficiency:[3]

> I only maintain that whatever our intentions — our democratic morality, our liberal egalitarian humanism, our hopes for socialism, as a positive value — may have been in the nineteenth century, for our time (and for the foreseeable future) we have developed a mechanism whereby politics operates independently of any such values."[4]

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1. The Political Illusion, p. 73.

2. Ibid., p. 72; see below, pp. 342-3, for a more thorough discussion of this point. Ellul, of course, recognizes that a degree of consent is necessary for a government to stay in power. He believes, however, that this consent is more a function of governmental propaganda than the expression of free human choice (see below, p. 307). Such propaganda would for him fall under the category of force. One might disagree that man is victimized by propaganda to the extent he imagines.

3. Ibid., p. 70. It may be true that politics is to a large extent incapable of realizing high ideals. Still, it seems that politics is no more an autonomous reality than is the technological society. In both cases Ellul thinks of "efficiency" as totally divorced from values, when in fact efficiency usually seems to be in the service of some human value, though from the Christian perspective the value may still warrant criticism (see The Technological Society, pp. 133ff.).

4. The Political Illusion, pp. 70-71. "The situation as found in dictatorships and communism has become the normal situation, and ... we must reflect on the political problem in relation to what happens there, and not on the basis of some ideal democracy that has no chance whatever of asserting itself. We already know well that the mores of the totalitarian states have gained footholds in the democracies. Police regimes, internment camps, an uncontrolled, all-powerful administration, systematic elimination of dissenting opinions and minorities are some of the signs ... If we examine the relationships among political men or political groups in a democracy, we see very quickly that these are relationships determined by force, blackmail, pressure, deals, prestige, careers, complicity — but that there is no moral rule whatsoever, no supremacy of values. Even in groups that are strongly ideological — I am thinking here of groups such as the intellectual Left — relations are often sordid and strikingly manifest this autonomy of the course of political events, even though in their public declarations these groups present themselves/...

He insists that even if an individual does a political act for a moral reason, the act enters the sphere of autonomous political reality and takes on a political, rather than a moral meaning.[1] "My mental reservations and my personal motives will remain only with me and have no effect in the world of my political act."[2] He concludes that if men are to engage in political activity, they must weigh the probable consequences of political acts, rather than thinking in terms of their own moral intentions.[3] He also concludes that an individual cannot fully realize himself in politics:-

> The autonomy of the political machinery not only does not permit individual acts to influence its operation, but individual acts and motives become completely submerged within it with the result that the individual, as such, simply ceases to be.[4]

For Christians in the idealistic tradition, it comes as a real shock that Ellul honestly believes that the state does a better job of governing if it does so on the basis of human realism. He believes that the effort to apply Christian values to the state has had

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themselves as defenders of virtue, humanism, and morality. It must be understood that the vocabulary of moral and non-material values is retained even in the most autonomous type of politics " (The Political Illusion, pp. 89-90).

1. Ibid., pp. 92-3.

2. Ibid., p. 92.

3. Ibid., p. 94. Of Ellul's position Christopher Lasch writes, "The 'moral revolution' does not consist of investing contemporary politics with passionate moralism. The only moral attitude toward politics, according to Ellul, is one of severe realism — one that tries to assess the probable consequences of political actions. Moralism interferes with this by contributing to the escalation of rhetoric; in the end, it merely provides additional fuel for the propaganda machine" (Lasch et al., Katallagete, p. 24). Even if politics does have to do with the consideration of consequences, are not these consequences to be examined with human morality in view? If this is the case, how can politics be said to be autonomous with reference to human morality? Ellul's realism seems here to border on cynicism. We can still agree, however, that politics is largely autonomous with reference to Christian "values" and hence that political choices seldom offer Christian alternatives. Our criticism is thus only of one aspect of Ellul's understanding of political autonomy.

4. The Political Illusion, p. 95.

disastrous consequences, blinding Christians to the actual reality of the state, and leading particular states to worldly imprudence, giving their enemies unfair advantage.[1] Along lines very similar to Reinhold Niebuhr in Moral Man and Immoral Society,[2] Ellul writes the following, which we quote at length because the statement summarizes his view so well:-

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1. "The gravest political errors, which have caused most of the bloodshed and disorders in the last half-century, were committed by those who, denying the regrettable, detestable, yet irrefutable fact that politics in our day is autonomous, acted as though it was not, as though it was subject to definite rules and values. ... On the one hand we have, as a result, the rise of such doctrinaires as Stalin and Hitler, who took this autonomy of political matter as their point of departure, stating clearly and constantly what they intended to do. It was enough to take their statements seriously. But democrats never did that, and therefore were always wrong (except perhaps for Churchill, who also ceaselessly affirmed the autonomy of political affairs). If democratic politicians, socialists, humanists, and Christians committed one error after another and believed that Hitler's or Stalin's declarations, like those of the FLN (National Liberation Front), Fidel Castro, or Nasser, were only speeches like those which they themselves delivered on Sundays, it was the result of their profound conviction that 'all this is not possible — politics is not independent of morality. It is not possible to have such ideas, to scoff at the law, not to keep one's word, to engage in vast conquests, to provoke revolutions, to deport masses of people in order to acquire living space — all that is not possible, nor is the establishment of socialism by force and conquest.'... The same error of judgement was committed by the leaders of Poland's and Czechoslovakia's democratic parties, who estimated that it was necessary to collaborate with the Communists. This resulted from a certain idealism born in the Resistance movement, but mainly from the conviction that Communists obeyed 'the same morality as we, as all of us'; that they were searching for justice and truth and were devoted to the good of the fatherland, and that one therefore could work with them. People hoped to be able to moderate the Communists, to make them democratic and receptive to the excellence of ideological and political liberalism by accepting their socialist economic planning methods. Unfortunately, as events have shown, all alliances, concessions, dialogues, and so on have only served the Communist tactic, which was neither liberal nor pluralist nor subject to values" (The Political Illusion, pp. 86-7).

2. Ellul refers to this work in To Will and To Do, p. 278.

In the face of perfectly autonomous political action, no invocation of values can be of the slightest use. Love of peace, and particularly the happiness of the people, promised by a political course not recognized as autonomous, assured Mussolini's victory in Ethiopia, Franco's in Spain, and Hitler's in Czechoslovakia. Only at the very last minute do the idealists grab hold of themselves and call a halt, which is then terribly costly and bloody because none of the measures that a clear understanding of the autonomy of political matters should have necessitated was taken in time. To say in our day that war is just when it is truly the ultima ratio,[1] and that it is acceptable only under such conditions, is once more to superimpose on a century without morals or values an essentially Christian judgment. It is to leave a considerable margin of action to the most realistic political course in the world in which politics is autonomous, which simply means that one accept the most violent and terrible war in return for not having acted in the beginning, for having been held back by scruples. I do not mean to say at all that war is good, desirable, or just. I reaffirm what I have often written, that "all war is unjust". No state can in good conscience wage war. But in a world where politics is autonomous, those engaged in politics must know that war or the threat of war is a normal political means, and that to deny this particular fact of autonomy is, under the cover of virtue and idealism, to make political affairs ultimately the most ruinous for the community. In our day there are no "good guys" who are victors and represent justice and right or "bad guys" who are politicians and are finally defeated. If Hitler had won, a trial conducted against the Soviet Union and the Western nations and based on exact facts would undoubtedly have ended in death sentences for our politicians. It must not be thought that the autonomy of political affairs exists only in dictatorships. It exists in different degrees in the democracies also.[2]

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1. Ellul describes the ultima ratio reasoning (which he finds in Barth's thought) as follows: "Granted that the state cannot be condemned to disappear, its right to defend itself must also be granted — but not unless it has previously employed every means to solve the differences pacifically, has made every possible sacrifice and exhausted every possible procedure for a peaceful settlement. That is to say, war cannot be just except as a last resort" (Violence, p. 7).

2. The Political Illusion, p. 88. In a realism reminiscent of Niebuhr's Ellul criticizes the United States for its "superficial idealism", its pretension that the ways of nations can be solved "by law and good will" (Violence, pp. 89-90). "The United States has always been ridden by violence, though the truth was covered over by a legalistic ideology and a moralistic Christianity. Americans have it that the Civil War was an accidental interruption of what was practically an idyllic state of affairs; actually, that war simply tore the veil off reality for a moment" (ibid., pp. 88-9). Niebuhr even could use language which is close to Ellul's language of the order of necessity: "To the sensitive spirit, society must always remain something of the jungle, which indeed it is, something of the world of nature" (Reinhold Niebuhr, Moral Man and Immoral Society, p. 81). Both Ellul and Niebuhr saw the brutal and coercive nature of social and political life (ibid., pp. xi, 266-273). (The early Niebuhr seems more cynical than he became later in his life. It is his early thought which parallels Ellul's.)

It is one thing to give a ruthlessly realistic description of politics, if one is prepared to defend Christian compromise and realism (Reinhold Niebuhr); it is another to do so while at the same time seeking to defend an uncompromising Christian perfectionism (Ellul). Great turbulance results from the fact that Ellul will not turn back from either his realistic sociology or his perfectionistic Christianity. This unique combination is one of the distinctive features of Ellul's ethical thought and one of the difficulties for the interpreter. What, for example, is one to make of his suggestion that Christians involved in politics are to speak up concerning the purity of the means used,[1] when here and elsewhere he says that political decisions ought to be based on concern for probable consequences?[2] He here says that states ought even to go to war, rather than, for moral reasons, waiting while another state prepares to crush them.[3]

One is tempted to accuse Ellul's dual morality of being little more than an encouragement for a Christian schizophrenia. Is he not asking Christians to witness to Christ with means consistent with the Gospel and then turning around and telling them that they can be

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1. False Presence, p. 197.

2. The direct clash between Ellul's political reasoning and his Christian perfectionism could not be more severe. The Christian is to be concerned about the purity of the means used, in the confidence that God alone is in charge of consequences. The politician is to be concerned about probable consequences, all political means being more or less immoral anyway (The Political Illusion, pp. 91-3; "The Technological Revolution", p. 51).

3. With reference to Barth's use of the ultima ratio just war theory Ellul writes, "The fact is that such negotiations and efforts for peace often give the eventual aggressor time to prepare himself better. For example, we must admit that the Munich pact of 1938, or the nonintervention in Italy's war against Ethiopia in 1935, bespoke wise and just attitudes on the part of France and England; and yet it was precisely these settlements that made the war of 1939-1945 infinitely more savage. All the world knows that if other nations had intervened against Hitler and Mussolini in 1934-1935, those two regimes would have foundered — and millions of lives would have been saved" (Violence, p. 7).

involved in nearly Machiavellian political practices? As tempting as this criticism is, it seems to be false. Ellul's dual morality basically points to the duality between the Church and the world, rather than to a schizophrenic duality within the Christian as such. If there is a problem in his thought here, it has to do with the fact that on his terms it becomes very difficult to see how Christians can truly share in political processes. If the political order is as autonomous as he says and if the Christian's obedience is to be as pure as he insists, then whatever else Christians can do, they seem incapable of being true politicians. If one accepts Ellul's understanding of the nature and purpose of the Christian life and his understanding of politics, then this conclusion follows and is not to be criticized.

To understand Ellul at this point we have to be aware that, while not absolutely prohibiting political participation in the usual sense of the word, he encourages a unique form of Christian witness with reference to politics. Politics being what it is, Christians who become involved in it find it impossible to express their obedience to Christ within their political vocation. This is so because politics is autonomous with reference to Christian influence. The autonomy of politics means that it is even inadvisable for Christians to attempt to lift politics to a higher level. What is called for is a more prudent realism, not the futile effort to invest secular politics with Christian meaning. With this understanding, one can see why on Ellul's terms it is virtually impossible to express Christian convictions in and through direct political activity (surely mere voting would be possible). If Christians attempt to be politicians, they are faced with the dilemma of having to engage in "Two Kingdom" reasoning. They are incapable of expressing their inner allegiance to Christ

in their outer political vocations.[1] Ellul is not happy with this line of reasoning because he knows that Christ claims the whole of the Christian's life.[2] Yet because of his aversion to legalism, he avoids making an absolute prohibition against Christian participation in politics in the usual sense of the word.

Ellul, however, generally has a more creative response. Rather than leaving the Christian in such a dilemma, he attempts to define new political alternatives, whereby the uniqueness of Christian existence would not have to be denied. At some points he seems to favour a totally indirect form of witness. The Christian is not to participate in direct political channels at all, but is to make an impact on politics through activity not directly political. (We recall his insistence, we think biblically well founded, that Christians are not obligated to be directly involved in politics.) At other points he refers to the possibility of a uniquely Christian presence within the political process as such. These two alternatives enable Christians to perform tasks consistent with their unique purpose, but without interfering with the necessary realism of the political process.

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1. At one point Ellul seems to admit that if a Christian participates in normal political activity, he is faced with the "Two Kingdom" dilemma. Ellul's difference here from the traditional "Two Kingdom" approach seems to us to be so subtle as to be unconvincing. Referring to the Syrian general Naaman (II Kings 5:1-19), he admits that Naaman was guilty of the heresy of "mental reservation", but Ellul later seems to absolve him by saying that he (unlike the advocates of "mental reservation") recognized the guilt associated with his political and military career (The Politics of God, pp. 35-40). Though Naaman may represent this subtle difference from the traditional doctrine, it is still the case that his inner faith was divorced from his outer conduct. As surprising as it may seem, at this one place Ellul says that the dilemma facing Naaman is identical with the dilemma facing all Christians involved in public service (ibid., p.38).

   At one point earlier in our work we found Ellul to be guilty of "Two Kingdom" reasoning. When he privatizes Christian love and utterly divorces it from public service, he implies that many aspects of Christian daily life cannot become channels through which we express our allegiance to Christ (False Presence, p. 68-69; see above, pp. 197-208).

2. See above, pp. 88-89, 266-267.

We begin our discussion of these two approaches by dealing with the alternative of a Christian presence within political channels. In the next section we will consider the other possibility.

If one looks carefully at what Ellul says about direct Christian participation in politics, it becomes doubtful whether he is usually speaking of political participation in the normal sense of the word. In actual fact he seems to re-define the nature of political participation in such a way as to give the Christian a task which is absolutely different from that of other people engaged in political activity. Instead of seeking to gain support for one's party, or for the issues or candidates supported by one's party, the Christian is to witness to Christ. He is not so much to pursue political objectives, as to preach to those who do, in the hope that they might be converted:[1]

> The participation in politics and the presence to the world have no value in themselves. It is not the vocation of the Church to promote a political or economic regime, or the welfare state, or socialism. Likewise it is not her business to advocate political solutions or to take sides in debates, which are generally exciting but superficial. The sole duty of the Church (in politics as well as in all else) is to take her stand in relation to the question: 'When the Son of man comes, will he find faith on earth?' [2]

Because the Christian task is to witness to the Wholly Other, the Christian's presence in politics is that of a traitor and a spy, who witnesses to a higher order.[3] In the face of the autonomy of politics,

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1. False Presence, pp. 129-130; see also The Political Illusion, p. 94; Protestantisme Français, pp. 142, 155.

2. False Presence, p. 177.

3. Ellul writes, "Because Christianity is the revelation of the Wholly Other, that action must be different, specific, and incommensurable with political or corporate methods" (Violence, p. 148). Christian participation in politics is like Christian participation in the city. The Christian is to use both only as preaching posts. The Christian task is so unique that it has little to do with political goals as such, or the building up of the city. Similarly, Ellul argues that Christian lawyers have the unique task of helping the poor, though the legal realm as such is seen to be autonomous in relationship to Christian values."

Christians speak of the importance of pure means. Thus Christians involved in politics perform a Christian rather than a political task.[1] In the face of political parties preoccupied with their own ideas, ideologies and practices — Christians are to speak on the behalf of divergent points of view, thus introducing transcendence.

In addition to the above statements supporting a re-definition of the Christian task in politics, there is additional evidence. Our interpretation makes sense of the fact that he regards direct participation in politics as worthless[2] and yet can still speak of a Christian presence in such worthless political channels. He can do so because the Christian presence really has little to do with what is commonly called political participation.

Our interpretation also makes comprehensible the puzzling fact that as a Christian Ellul opposes violence, but recognizes that from a biblical point of view the state cannot do its job without using coercion and violence.[3] He is not encouraging Christian support for or participation in political violence. He is only insisting that in specific ways Christians ought to recognize that the way of the world is different from the Christian way. If the Christian is going to assess the state, he must do so from perspectives meaningful to the state and not from the Christian perspective.[4] (Here Ellul is in agreement

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1. False Presence, p. 197.

2. He writes, "I am convinced that any action we take ... in politics ... is utterly useless" ("Mirror", p. 203; see also the following section).

3. "Rappels et Réflexions", p. 164. He writes of the state, "It is equipped with the sword, responsible for punishing, reprimanding, and making a certain good reign (even if it is not the good revealed by God) and of making it reign by means of violence (disapproved by God)" (ibid., p. 166).

4. Ibid., pp. 150, 156. "The state is called upon to apply a morality which is not the Christian morality. It applies the morality of the world, but still a morality; and it is from within that morality and in relation to it that the Christian is called upon to judge whatever the/...

with F.J. Leenhardt).[1] This does not mean, however, that the Christian as Christian can himself use violence.[2] Thus Christian political participation is either being redefined or discouraged.[3]

Though Ellul grants the possibility of a Christian witness in political channels, he says other things which show his discouragement concerning the possibility. For example, he tells us that he regards

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the state does. To protest to the state against torture in the name of Jesus Christ is absurd. To protest in the name of the declaration of rights, a moral principle that the state itself has established, is legitimate" (To Will and To Do, pp. 105-6).

Ellul's words here contradict his statement to the effect that politics is autonomous with reference to human morality (see above, pp. 292-295).

Ellul tells us that if Christians are to witness to God's demands in the social order, they must openly state the confessional basis of what they say. He offers only two choices. Either Christians appeal to the state on the basis of something the state accepts as authoritative, for example, a constitution (To Will and To Do, p. 106; False Presence, p. 179), or they make a Christian demand in the context of an explicit confession of Christ (To Will and To Do, p. 107; see also The Political Illusion, p. 94; see above, pp. 144-6.

1. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 150-1.

2. Ibid., p. 166.

3. Ellul is of one mind with F.J. Leenhardt in recognizing the contrast between the methods of the Christian life and the methods necessarily employed by the state, with the resulting implication that Christians are not obligated to participate in politics (ibid., pp. 150-1). Ellul writes, "The magistrate uses means (those of violence) which are precisely forbidden to Christians. It is here that the development of Rom. 12 and 13 is very clarifying: the Christian must not render evil for evil; in the face of evil, he must forgive. However, the evil done on earth in the social order cannot remain unpunished. The state is charged by God with the responsibility of punishing evil; therefore it does that which is not possible for the Christian to do. It has this mission, which Christians obey and respect for this role; but they do not have to get mixed up in it: they have another way of action in the world. And we find exactly the same attitude with respect to the juridical function: this is quite valid to do. But here again, Christians don't have to become mixed up in it. ... There is the word of Jesus who refused to judge when they brought him a juridical affair to settle (Lk. 12:14) and on the other hand the text of I Cor. where Paul recommends to the Christians not to have recourse to the law court. Thus this can clearly mean that even where the state remains within its legitimate limits, where it correctly fulfils the role assigned to it, its role must not be exalted. The state is nothing absolute nor definitive. 'Especially where the Christian can surpass it, without menacing its existence, he should do so'. (Cullmann)" ("Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 166-7).

the political "arena" as one of the least effective places to witness to Christ.[1] If people are largely unable to hear the Gospel in a political context, perhaps Christians should seek more opportune places to witness to Christ. While avoiding the absolute legalism of rejecting a uniquely Christian witness in the political realm, Ellul severely discourages it, on the evangelical grounds that it is a poor place to make an effective witness.

In another way Ellul indicates that in the final analysis political participation on the part of Christians is to be discouraged. We have in mind his belief concerning the trans-political nature of the clergy.[2] He tells us that a pastor should not be involved in a

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1. He has various reasons for thinking that the political order is far from the most effective place to witness to Christ. He says that in France only 10 per cent of the people of voting age are members of a party and only a small percentage of workers attend union meetings. Thus, in France, even in a physical sense, one meets only a minority of the people at such meetings. In addition, he argues that those committed enough to attend party or union meetings are usually the very people who are least likely to be responsive to a genuine Christian witness, because they already are committed to stereotyped judgments (False Presence, pp. 103-4). Even if Christians are serious about speaking of Christian things, their witness will be neutralized because people at such meetings are psychologically incapable of hearing other than what they came to hear. Ellul thinks that what usually happens in such situations is that the Christian presence is used simply as propaganda for political goals having nothing to do with Christianity (ibid., pp. 148-9). "To the man in the street, the political presence of Christians does not signify a call to conversion, or a recognition that all issues are subject to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, but simply: 'The Christians are on our side' ... If Christians are asked to be present among politicians, that is for the sake of their moral certification, which helps avoid certain criticisms. It is also for the sake of the effect on segments of the population attached to Christianity, because the Church in the end represents a degree of power as an institution. As has often been said, Christians in this situation are hostages. If it were merely a matter of our persons, it would not be important, and I would keep quiet about it. But, as a result of our intervention, it is God's truth which is being held hostage, which is being used as a pretext, as a justification, as a means of propaganda. That is why we are driven to the point of no compromise. We have to say 'No'" (ibid., pp. 149-150).

2. From what Ellul has said concerning Barmen, we need to add that direct political participation could become imperative for laymen and clergymen, but that such is rarely the case.

political party, nor take public stands on outright political issues:[1]

> If the pastor is supposed to be the "leader of the flock", he should not be injecting division. He should avoid being a stumbling block to the weak, to the non-political, etc. He ought not to scatter the sheep, which is necessarily what would happen were he to take strict political stands. Surrounded by the various and multiple commitments of the faithful, he should be the one who remains impartial, outside the party, ready to hear all, to understand all, to have the confidence of all (which he no longer has once he becomes partisan); ready also to reconcile Christians of opposite leanings.[2]

He says that the clergyman ought to seek to love and understand those of differing political viewpoints, a much more difficult and unnatural task than taking sides. He even says that if a pastor expresses partisan political viewpoints he is showing that his political commitment is greater than his commitment to Christ. Ellul is not in the least worried that the trans-political clergy might set a bad example for the laity. Quite to the contrary, he regards such to be a good example, for he thinks that all Christians should be involved in seeking to love and understand those of diverse political persuasions.[3]

A difference between the clergy and the laity as seen by Ellul is that he denies the former the right to seek a reconciling presence in and through political parties, whereas he grants that the laity may do precisely that. Though all Christians are to seek to love and understand those of differing political viewpoints, clergymen are limited to doing so totally outside political channels. One wonders why such a limitation should be placed on clerics (since they are basically to seek to accomplish the same thing as the laity).[4] Perhaps the truth

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1. False Presence, pp. 191-2.
2. Ibid., p. 192.
3. Ibid., p. 192.
4. If, as Ellul has said previously, Christians should feel free to discuss political issues, it seems unfair vocationally to exclude clergymen from this calm and tolerant discussion.

of the matter is that at this point Ellul is really referring to the ideal of a non-political clergy and laity. One can't help thinking that if the clergy is to set a trans-political ideal, Ellul can't have much objection to a trans-political laity as well.

In the following section we will see that on the basis of a study of modern political reality, Ellul has come to regard direct political participation to be of little value, and instead encourages all men to seek to influence politics entirely through indirect channels.

The Inability of Citizens to Control the State or to Effectively Participate in Politics

We will now look briefly at Ellul's sociological analysis of the inability of democratic citizens to control the state or to effectively participate in politics. Then we will consider some specific strategy proposals, which relate to this analysis, but which also relate to normative theological considerations.

Ellul regards it as an illusion to think that democratic citizens can any longer control the modern state. He has two major reasons for thinking that this is no longer possible. First, he doesn't think that it is possible for citizens to be adequately informed to do so. He points out that the mere fact that citizens can vote does not mean that they actually control the state.[1] He thinks that citizens do not have time and often do not have the ability to become informed about the complex issues on which they are expected to vote.[2]

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1. The Political Illusion, p. 161.

2. Ibid., pp. 137, 163. One wonders whether Ellul is not guilty here of an all-or-nothing type of reasoning. Though it may be true that many citizens cannot become adequately informed on many issues, one wonders whether some citizens cannot become informed about some issues.

The problem of gaining information is even more complex and is related to the fact that citizens do not have access to unbiased sources of information. In Ellul's view, political affairs are today transacted in an illusory "verbal universe" created by political advertising technicians.[1] It is they who determine the political "facts" from which public opinion is formed. They create the world of images through which people interpret political reality. The political public relations men actually create public opinion, rather than honouring a public opinion already existent.[2] They utilize the techniques of propaganda to sell their candidates or programmes.[3]

The second and major reason why Ellul thinks that popular control of the state is a myth is because he doesn't think that the elected officials really govern. To the contrary, he thinks that government is basically in the hands of the non-elected technical experts who reside in the administrative bureaux of government.[4] He believes that the politicians seldom make decisions apart from the advice of the technical experts. He thinks that their advice usually is honoured uncritically, since the technicians are believed to have information which the politicians do not have or which the politicians do not have the ability, inclination or time to understand. Even when politicians do make rare decisions on their own, he thinks these decisions are left to the bureaucrats to apply.[5]

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1. The Political Illusion, pp. 103-117, 125.

2. Ibid., p. 105.

3. Though propaganda may exert a great influence on political decision-making, one may think that man is not totally captivated to the influence of propaganda as Ellul thinks. Politicians may have to honour existing public opinion to some degree.

4. Ibid., p. 138; The Technological Society, pp. 268, 274.

5. The Technological Society, p. 162; The Political Illusion, pp. 36-9, 142-4, 152. He also thinks that the technicians in the bureaux of government have a fundamentally undemocratic understanding. "The/...

A further argument Ellul adduces in support of the thesis of The Political Illusion is his belief that the leaders of political groups, labour unions, parties, etc. do not represent the interests of their members.[1] He believes that the political parties consist of a "fossilized rank and file" led by party directors only out to win money and votes.[2] The technicians at the top of political organizations are seen to be experts at handling and manipulating people — not experts at representing the interests of their constituency.

"The technician sees the nation quite differently from the political man: to the technician, the nation is nothing more than another sphere in which to apply the instruments he has developed. To him, the state is not the expression of the will of the people ... It is an enterprise providing services that must be made to function efficiently. He judges states in terms of their capacity to utilize techniques effectively, not in terms of their relative justice. Political doctrine revolves around what is useful rather than what is good. Purpose drops out of sight and efficiency becomes the central concern. As the political form best suited to the massive and unprincipled use of technique, dictatorship gains in power. And this in turn narrows the range of choice for democracies: either they too use some version of effective technique — centralized control and propaganda — or they will fall behind" (The Technological Society, p. vii; see also Propaganda, p. 252).

It is interesting that when discussing the factors which lead to the illusory nature of politics, Ellul does not discuss the influence of supra-national corporations. One suspects that such an omission is due to his oversimplified tendency to blame modern ills on technology, a phenomenon common to Capitalism and Communism. In this particular instance it seems that Capitalism as such also contributes to the political illusion, though Communism in other ways may also do this.

1. "No national party or union congress reflects the will of the rank and file, and all use the classic tricks, now further refined by the knowledge of group dynamics" (The Political Illusion, p. 176).

2. The Technological Society, p. 417. Ellul thinks that politicians are merely technicians specializing in the technique of getting elected and holding power (ibid., p. 257; The Political Illusion, p. 151). Politicians have to be wealthy, for otherwise they couldn't buy the propaganda services necessary for getting elected (The Technological Society, pp. 275, 374, 419). The politician also has to be a committed member of the party machinery, for he will need additional financial help from the party (ibid., p. 419). Ellul concludes that there is no connection between the ability to gain power and the ability to make wise and just political decisions (The Political Illusion, pp. 151-2).

Ellul thus refers to organised democracy as the "new feudalism", not based on landed estates but otherwise similar. "The professional organization of parties, unions, and movements perfectly represent the hierarchy of the new lords."[1] He is here stating his general thesis of the dictatorship of the technical experts,[2] but is applying it to the internal workings of political organizations, rather than to the relationship between politicians and bureaucratic technicians. He calls this political illusion the illusion of participation. Because of the dictatorship of party technicians who feed the rank and file on propaganda, he believes that citizens cannot effectively participate in political life.[3]

Without attempting a thorough sociological evaluation of the above points, it seems fair to say that many will agree that Ellul has touched on some vitally important problems which have the effect of undermining democracy. The criticism of his analysis will probably come from those who, while admiring the significance of his observations, may think that he has overstated the degree to which democracy has become an illusion, the degree to which these problems apply. What is

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1. The Political Illusion, p. 180; see also p. 176; A Critique, pp. 110ff.

2. The Technological Society, pp. 160-162, 389-391.

3. He also believes that sensitive and responsible individuals find work within a party to be too confining. He writes, "It cannot be stressed enough that commitment to a political movement or party entails the surrender of personal responsibility and freedom of judgment" (The Political Illusion, p. 171). "It is even probable that those with the strongest conscience and the greatest knowledge of political affairs refuse to enter these machines, which fabricate conformism. The same goes for those who are very committed to professional or social activities and are afraid of the enormous amount of time lost in union or party meetings. ... Perhaps something can be done in such an organization, but at the price of how much lost time? After how many years? Eventually, the time spent in such groups prevents a normal life and forces the participant to become a professional. And if he wants no part of that?" (ibid., pp. 179-180).

of importance to us is to recognize that because Ellul feels that little can be accomplished through direct political means, he emphasizes the importance of an indirect approach to politics.

Some Proposals Concerning Indirect Political Activity

Since Ellul believes that democracy no longer exists, since he thinks that all direct political channels are of no value to the democratic citizen, his proposed response to the political dilemma is not political, in the direct sense of that word. For sociological reasons he has no confidence that direct political activity as such accomplishes much. (Of course, a witness to the Gospel may still be possible, though he does not see the political order as the most opportune context for that.)

The first form of indirect political activity we will discuss is the twofold recommendation that individual citizens assume personal responsibility by (1) finding autonomous values, over against the values dictated by the state; (2) by defining their existence by participation in autonomous groups not directly political. Since these two points are integrally related, we will consider them together.

Ellul's first suggestion is that we must begin with individual self-awareness.[1] Since he understands the social and political problem largely in terms of man's adaptation to systems (technological mechanism, the primacy of science, bureaucracies), so he stresses the need to rehabilitate the democratic citizen's virtue.[2] He calls for

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1. The Political Illusion, pp. 205-206, 224.

2. Ibid., p. 232; "Between Chaos and Paralysis", pp. 747-749. "For what is under attack in our present society is the autonomy of the citizen, his ability to judge for himself. He is up against a network of information, public relations, propaganda in diverse forms" (ibid., p. 749). "When I speak of the individual as the source of hope I mean the individual who does not lend himself to society's game, who disputes what we accept as self-evident (for example, the consuming society) who finds an autonomous style of life..." (ibid., p. 748).

the establishing of autonomous values and traditions, the setting up of a tension between the values of the democratic citizen and the prevailing values of society. He calls for the building of a new daily life, which would enable the citizen to become critical of the "normal" ways dictated by society.[1] He regards such a distancing from society as so difficult to achieve that he believes that only Christians can attain it.[2]

Ellul's second proposal is that autonomous groups be formed, groups defining their values without reference to the state. He is not calling these groups to any kind of direct political involvement. He tells us that the political illusion is precisely the illusion that we can modify reality in our day through the exercise of political power.[3]

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1. "Between Chaos and Paralysis", p. 749.

2. Ibid., pp. 749-750. He acknowledges his debt to Kierkegaard, who has influenced him in the line of reasoning outlined in this paragraph (ibid., p. 749). Kierkegaard was suspicious of involvement in collective movements (Kierkegaard, The Last Years, pp. 33, 182) and committed his life to helping to establish the primacy of the individual over the mass (ibid., pp. 40, 132; The Journals, pp. 116, 133-135). "If my genius can be said to be related to anything at all then it is to being in the minority" (The Journals, p. 147). The real reason that Kierkegaard was concerned about the individual had to do with his belief in the Christian significance of an individual's direct responsibility to God (Kierkegaard, The Last Years, p. 203) and the importance of a personal recognition of one's own sinfulness (ibid., p. 188).
   Ellul represents a similar point of view (Presence of the Kingdom, p. 93), though we think that he, unlike Kierkegaard, was not guilty of individualism. He writes, "From the fact of the action of the Holy Spirit, each one's work is thoroughly personalized, as well as his life. He is no longer just any man, this person laid hold of by grace. He is no longer one of the mass of mankind. He is a person" (To Will and To Do, p. 219). Interestingly enough, Ellul cites his dependence on Barth at this point rather than on Kierkegaard. He writes, "It is obvious that all this is registered in the doctrine of the determination of man by election, which nevertheless does not rule out this man's self-determination (on all this K. Barth, II/2, p. 510)" (To Will and To Do, p. 305).

3. The Political Illusion, pp. 135, 221-222.

> The hope must be surrendered that constitutional rules, good institutions, or socio-economic changes will modify anything in decisive fashion.[1] The hope must be abandoned that the citizen will be able to control the state ... The fundamental error in 1789 [in France] was to believe that controls over the state could be found in the state, and that the latter could be a self-regulating mechanism. Experience has shown us that the state will retreat only when it meets an insurmountable obstacle. This obstacle can only be man, i.e., citizens organized independently of the state.[2]

He says that we must leave politics behind, not because we are unconcerned about collective and social life, but because we are seeking these goals by a different, a more indirect route:[3]

> This means that we must try to create positions in which we reject and struggle with the state not in order to modify some element of the regime or force it to make some decision, but much more fundamentally, in order to permit the emergence of social, political, intellectual, or artistic bodies, associations, interest groups, or economic or Christian groups totally independent of the state, yet capable of opposing it, able to reject its pressures as well as its controls and even its gifts. These organizations must be completely independent, not only materially but also intellectually and morally, i.e., able to deny that the nation is the supreme value and that the state is the incarnation of the nation. ... They must, that is, be poles of tension confronting the state, forcing the latter to "think again" and limiting itself to considering the real political problems without being in a position of omnipotence.[4]

He suggests that the emergence of such groups "would in a certain sense perhaps reduce the power of the nation, the growth of technology, the economic and military competition with other nations."[5]

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1. Ellul cannot quite seem to make up his mind as to whether his own thesis of the totally illusory nature of politics is convincing. Elsewhere he tells us that "politics can solve administrative problems concerning the material development of a city, or general problems of economic organization — which is a considerable accomplishment" (The Political Illusion, p. 186).

2. Ibid., p. 202.

3. Ibid., p. 221.

4. Ibid., pp. 222-3. "These words clearly imply a defense of the existing autonomy, and an attempt to enlarge the autonomy, of such institutions as the family and the school, in the face of all pressures to politicize them" (Lasch, Katallagete, p. 26).

5. The Political Illusion, p. 223. The goal Ellul sees for such autonomous groups is not the destruction of the state (ibid., p. 223).

Here Ellul has offered Christians a kind of political "alternative service." He does not want Christians simply to remain passive, for he believes that in an indirect way the Church can find a true political significance.[1] It is no doubt true that there is an indirect approach to political problems which may be much more significant than is commonly recognized. For example, the renewal of the Church in inner and outer faithfulness to her Lord may indeed have the effect of cutting down on the totalitarian omnicompetence of the state.

Though the above proposal relates directly to Ellul's sociological analysis, it wouldn't be correct to say that he has simply based a moral "ought" on a sociological "is". We earlier saw that for theological reasons he is critical of the omnicompetent state. He thinks that the Bible understands the state to be much more limited.[2] We also saw that for theological reasons he advocates a separation between the Church and the state. His description of that separation was as follows: the Church is not to use the state to establish herself or to spread the Gospel; she is not to use the state's means of coercion, nor its financial resources.[3] Ellul believes that the Church has her own Gospel to proclaim and that the state is intended by God for the limited purpose of providing order and hence must not claim to be an ultimate value. These theological beliefs lead to the conclusion that the Church must be an autonomous group, obedient to her own Lord. Likewise, when he speaks of the importance of the Church's dialogue with the state, he is insisting that for theological reasons the

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1. Ellul has pointed out the cultural side of political activity (Lasch, Katallagete, p. 22).

2. He puts his theological point in sociological terms when he says that we wrongly conceive of society if we think of it "as a whole made up of dead pieces without autonomy, receiving an active place only in a coherent system, and obtaining life only from the supreme impetus of political power..." (The Political Illusion, p. 14).

3. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 170-171.

Church must be autonomous in relation to the state.[1]

Though Ellul has good theological reasons for advocating autonomy with reference to the state and though he has specifically Christian reasons for appealing to Christians at this point, the first form of indirect political activity we have discussed is applicable to both Christian and non-Christian. The following recommendations are addressed only to Christians and are directly related to the self-understanding which Ellul believes Christians alone possess.

The second form of indirect political activity he recommends to Christians has to do with the task of criticizing the commonplace assumptions from which political propagandists make their appeal.[2] Instead of being obsessed with political current events, Christians are to probe and critically assess society's underlying assumptions. In his view this evaluation of commonplaces should involve not only sociological analysis, but also an evaluation of underlying psychological ways of interpreting life. Christians are to assess "the psychic and emotional thread running through politics".[3]

He thinks that Christians could be capable of this task; they would have time to become well-informed because they would be studying long-term phenomena, not the mere passing phenomena of current events. Also, they would have a genuine interest in such study, since it would contribute to their own continuing search for a faithful way of life

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1. "Rappels et Réflexions", pp. 174-9.

2. He defines a commonplace as an unquestioned assumption and instrument of judgment (A Critique, pp. 13-14). "It is the common standard that enables people to understand one another when they discuss politics or civilization" (ibid., p. 13). In the biography we dealt with the related recommendation that Christian intellectuals are to sound early warnings, when political situations are still capable of just solution (see above, p.x).

3. False Presence, p. 185.

in the modern world.[1]

He thinks that if Christians remained free from bondage to worldly views and partisan commitments, and free for obedience to God alone, they would be able to bring a uniquely critical perspective to bear on political affairs. Christians should take advantage of their transcendent perspective by playing a critical role, rather than being greatly concerned to take part directly in political affairs. Were they to do the latter to any great extent, they would lose their capacity to do the former effectively.[2] Just as Ellul himself abandoned his political career in 1947, but has spent his lifetime critically assessing political reality (in a general way) and modern commonplaces, so he recommends to Christians this same task of critical reflection, rather than direct political involvement. Ellul's book, A Critique of the New Commonplaces, is really an example of the sort of thing he has in mind.

A third recommendation Ellul makes for an indirect form of political witness is that if Christians seek to support a particular political policy they should personally converse with those in authority.[3] The task of talking personally with those in authority is quite different from the methods of direct political action. Such "discreet" activity does not at all assume participation in a party, a union, or any other political form.

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1. False Presence, p. 184.

2. "To put into operation that genuine perspective ... a great independence of judgment is indispensable. If, in fact, one remains bound to the day-by-day happenings, if one becomes engrossed in current events, if one gets involved in the uncertainties of groups and political parties, ... then by that very fact one becomes radically incapable of all long-range political reflection" (ibid., p. 186; see also pp. 165, 182-183, 206).

3. Ibid., p. 195. This recommendation reminds one of what Ellul has already said concerning Christians talking with corporation heads and attorneys representing the interests of the poor. Likewise, the criticism/...

Conclusion

As one looks back over this chapter, it seems easier to synthesize what Ellul says of a theoretical nature, than to harmonize his practical applications. His theological and biblical insights seem consistent, though we have criticized them at particular points. Political affairs are relative and hence ought not to be invested with absolute commitment. To a considerable extent politics is autonomous, at least with reference to values which could be called Christian. (We do not agree that politics is autonomous with reference to human values, nor do we think that Ellul himself consistently affirms the same.) Granting these theological insights (confirmed by Ellul's sociology), the question still remains — what ought Christians to do.

Ellul has in effect given us a plurality of answers to this question, some seeming to stand in contradiction to others. The most clear and obvious thing he says is that Christians are not obligated to be involved in politics. Granting this insight, which we think biblically defensible from the New Testament, there are still various alternatives for Christians, who are concerned about politics. There seems to be no doubt that the approach to which Ellul is most sympathetic is the one least political. The fact that he grants the right of a uniquely Christian presence in political channels cannot disguise the fact that he is discouraged concerning the prospects. What he says about the non-political clergyman and what he says about the psychological incapacity for preaching to be heard within political channels leads him to have a little confidence in politics as an effective preaching post. Likewise, what he says in response to the problems

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criticism that this activity is probably not possible for all Christians, but only for those gifted in verbal abilities, also applies.

of control and participation shows his general willingness to abandon direct political channels. He even advises this for non-Christians. The language he uses when speaking of the formation of autonomous groups indicates that he has in mind leaving behind all forms of direct political participation. We think, however, that this would not be necessary, since a uniquely Christian presence in politics would not be inconsistent with total freedom with reference to human political options. Likewise, Christian preaching in politics is not inconsistent with the task of criticizing commonplaces or personally conversing with those in authority. However, all of these forms of political witness clash with political activity in the normal sense of the word.

Ellul's anti-legalism forces him to retain the possibility of normal political participation for Christians. Still, he does not encourage such participation, since the Christian's evangelical purpose has to be denied. On numerous occasions, he refers to the Christian preferability of dropping out of politics, rather than making the compromises required.[1]

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1. "The Church's stance in politics (hence that of each Christian) should be specific and unique, not commensurate with the attitudes of the 'pagans'. The pagans can take care of their own affairs very well without outside help" (False Presence, p. 177). "I reject the habitual game played by intellectuals in which they project values and spiritual content into political facts. ... If a Christian insists on God's absolute demand for some particular act, let him do so; but he ought to know that he is not making a political demand. Herein lies the contradiction and the beginning of conflict; for a man ought to realize that there is no common frame of reference in the alleged demand of God and the execution of a particular political act. If indeed,we seek a place to make our fine feeling and our humanism count, let us not participate in politics: it is no longer capable of absorbing human warmth" (The Political Illusion, p. 94). "But, someone is sure to object, if you absolutely rule out dirty hands, don't you rule out politics? ... I have not yet found any proof that politics is the imperative of man's salvation, although many impassioned declarations have, of course, been written on the subject" (A Critique, p. 48). "To claim to lead Christians into political activity as an extension of love on a worldwide scale is to deny to love its own special expression displayed to us in the Bible. It is to rob the Christian presence in the world of its true usefulness" (False Presence, p. 70). He says that it is an historical fact that whenever the Church as Church has become involved in politics she has betrayed the truth of the Gospel (ibid., pp. 118, 121). "We know how political
action/...

We also recall that Ellul does not absolutely prohibit the Church from occasionally speaking out on behalf of political options which clearly approximate Christian truth. What he says concerning Christian opposition to racism and concerning his support of the Barmen confession -- allows for the Church as a corporate body to occasionally speak out on political issues. Still, granted the autonomous nature of most[1] political reality, it would be very rare that the moral ambiguity of political choices would clear long enough for the unequivocal Christian preferability of one alternative to be obvious.

Through a process of offering various alternatives and criticizing all but those of the totally indirect kind, it becomes obvious that Ellul's preference has to do with those discussed in the last section.

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action, which is a thousand times justified on the human plane, leads to heresy ..., how it leads to a scandalously anti-Christian behavior and to a loss of the sense of charity" (False Presence, p. 122). "In the final analysis, every time the Church has gotten into the political game, no matter what the manner of her entry, no matter what her opinion or opposing choices in a political situation with regard to an institution, she has been drawn every time into a betrayal, either of revealed truth or of the incarnate love. She has become involved every time in apostasy. When all is said and done it seems as though politics is the Church's worst problem. It is her constant temptation, the occasion of her greatest disasters, the trap continually set for her by the Prince of this world" (ibid., pp. 125-126). He thinks that when we treat problems as political, rather than human, we find immoral solutions more tolerable (The Political Illusion, pp. 190-1). "The Third Reich had no doubt that the Jewish problem had to be 'solved'. In the eyes of the Nazi chiefs it was a political problem. Therefore they could give an abstract order for the massacre. But all historians of the Third Reich report that Himmler fainted when he saw a few dozen Jews shot. At that point, the matter had suddenly become brutally human again. But in the ordinary course of the political process, the human aspects are generally hidden. Actually, the political point of view allows people today to escape values, to obliterate the reality of human situations which are individual situations and therefore no longer of interest" (ibid., p. 191).

1. If politics is as autonomous with reference to human values as Ellul sometimes says, it is hard to see how the Church could ever be called to a confessional stance on a political issue.

One may entirely agree that this indirect form of witness is important. We believe, however, that one could affirm the importance of this and still make a unique witness to Christ within political channels. We can see, however, that the objectivity required for criticizing commonplaces would be lost to those Christians involved in politics in the usual sense of the word.

The real choice seems to us to be between direct political participation in the usual sense of the word and all of these other forms of political witness. In spite of the "Two Kingdom" difficulties involved in direct political participation, we should still hold this open as a vocational possibility for some Christians — though one which faces them with many agonizing difficulties. Ellul has made a good case for the importance of indirect forms of political activity, since these can be undertaken with less necessity for compromising the content of the Christian Gospel. These other forms also point to a unique contribution which Christians could make, but which may be more difficult for non-believers. (We are thinking of the eschatological freedom which should help to give Christians an objective distancing from various political claims.) We think, however, that in the final analysis the whole spectrum of possibilities offered by Ellul must be left as real possibilities before which each Christian must decide in responsiveness to God. Though Ellul has indicated his own preference, he would surely not have discussed the other alternatives, if he did not regard them as genuine choices open to Christians.

CHAPTER VIII

CHAPTER VIII

THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MONEY

Mammon

Though modern men think of money as a neutral object, Ellul argues that Jesus saw money as an active power of temptation.[1] He points out that Jesus personified money by calling it Mammon (Mtt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13). Jesus saw money as an active subject, rather than a neutral object. This means that the Christian question concerning money is not simply that of its proper use. Money must first of all be desacralized, relativized, stripped of its attributes of divinity. Only in this context can the question of Christian stewardship occur. Just as Ellul sees natural man as in bondage to sin, so he sees man as in slavery to a false understanding of life which (among other things) puts money rather than God at the centre.[2]

Ellul surely is aware that money in and of itself is simply paper and hence is not itself evil. (If he saw money as itself evil, it is hard to see how he could go on to argue that money for Christians can become a material instrument, rather than a demonic power.)[3] Though a literal interpretation of his words at the above points might

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1. "L'Argent", pp. 35-6. Ellul admits that at some places the Old Testament regards riches as the reward for obedience. However, he insists that at many other places the Old Testament judges and condemns riches. He is emphatic that in the New Testament riches are condemned (L'Homme et L'Argent, pp. 39-40). In actuality Ellul is here using the New Testament (and the teaching of Jesus in particular) as normative and is evaluating the Old Testament teaching accordingly. This practice is possible because of a Christocentric emphasis and because the words of Scripture are not simply equated with the Word of God.

2. "L'Argent", pp. 31-2.

3. See below, pp. 323-324.

seem to support such a naive assumption, he surely is speaking of something far deeper. He apparently means that the natural relationship of man to money is one which is destructive of true life. The demonic has so perverted man's relationship to money that money exerts an attractive power which leads to preoccupation with the things that it can buy. (Because the demonic leads to this false relationship between man and money, Scripture refers to money as "unrighteous mammon" (Lk. 16:9, 11).)[1] The problem of money, from a biblical perspective, is first and foremost that of gaining freedom from the demonic; it is not simply the moral problem of gaining wisdom concerning the proper use of money.[2] (We recall that Ellul sees Christ first as Saviour and only secondly as a teacher.)

Ellul's exegetical point is biblically defensible. Money is indeed personified as Mammon in Mtt. 6:24 and Lk. 16:13. With reference to this fact Wolfgang Trilling writes:-

> Jesus knows that wealth is not a neutral thing. Wealth has a seductive power which seeks to enslave men. Hence he speaks of Mammon as being actually in competition with God [Mtt.] (6:24c). No one can escape its seductive pull unless he turns away completely to give his heart to God.[3]

Professor Hauck comments that in Jesus' teaching Mammon has derogatory connotations ("materialistic, anti-godly, sinful"):-

> In the earthly property which man gathers (Mtt. 6:19ff.), in which he erroneously seeks security (Lk. 12:15ff.), to which he gives his heart (Mtt. 6:21), and because of which he ceases to love, Jesus finds the very opposite of God (Mtt. 6:24). Because of the demonic power immanent in possessions, surrender to them brings practical enslavement (Mtt. 6:19ff.). The righteous must resolutely break free from this entanglement and stand in exclusive religious dependence on God (Mtt. 6:24).[4]

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1. "L'Argent", pp. 44-5.

2. Ibid., pp. 32-33.

3. Wolfgang Trilling, Matthew, Vol. 2, p. 118; see also Vol. 1, pp. 122-123.

4. Hauck, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV, G. Kettle, ed., p. 389. Joachim Jeremias writes, "Jesus has a loving/...

Sociological Confirmation

Though Ellul's point is established theologically, he finds sociological confirmation. He says that modern man sees money as all-important and sacred. He believes that this is true of all classes in society[1] and of all societies.[2] Though, on his terms, materialism is no uniquely modern phenomenon, he does think that the economic aspect of life is now becoming more dominant than ever before. Man is more and more becoming absorbed in an economic network and losing his autonomy with reference to the economy.[3] He thinks that man now understands himself as "economic man", man, the producer-consumer.[4] Modern man values material possessions and his stomach.[5] His life-ideal is reduced increasingly to "gorging". "He who has money is the slave of the money he has. He who has it not is the slave of the mad desire to get it. The first and great law is consumption.

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loving attitude to the poor, but his words about riches are sharp. ... It is only a fool who builds barns in the face of catastrophe (Lk. 12.18), who with an inferno after him rushes into his house to rescue some of his possessions (Lk. 17.31; Mk. 13.15 par.). Earthly possessions are transitory things, which woodworm and rust devour (Mtt. 6.19-21 par.) ... But what is there in possessions that leads to sin? It is the danger of mammonism (Mtt. 6.24), the danger that money may take the place of God as a dominant factor. Jesus regards this danger as such a fearful one that he can say that a camel will be able to go through the eye of a needle before a rich man can enter the reign of God (Mk. 10.25 par.); i.e. it is — from a human point of view — impossible (v. 27, cf. Lk. 6.24f.)" (Jeremias, New Testament Theology, Vol. 1, p. 222; see also Rev. 3:15-19).

1. "L'Argent", p. 33.

2. He says that all political forms today regard man primarily as a producer and consumer. He believes that the USSR and the USA are in essential agreement at this point (L'Homme Mesure, p. 8).

3. "Man is included in the economy. He belongs to the economy body and soul. That is the serious problem, the appearance of which can be called 'economic man'" (Pour une Economie, p. 45).

4. The Technological Society, pp. 218ff; A Critique, p. 19; Violence, pp. 35-36.

5. The Technological Society, p. 193.

Nothing but this imperative has any value in such a life."[1] Today we are unable to envision comfort except as a part of technological materialism:-

> Comfort for us means bathrooms, easy chairs, foam rubber mattresses, air conditioning, washing machines, and so forth. The chief concern is to avoid effort and promote rest and physical euphorea. For us comfort is closely associated with the material life; it manifests itself in the perfection of personal goods and machines.[2]

The Relativizing of Money

Ellul believes that the only hope of relativizing money has to do with the receipt of God's grace and power which leads to true freedom.[3] When God's presence leads to the relativizing of money, then it becomes a material instrument, rather than a demonic power of temptation.[4] When money is de-demonized, when man's relationship to it is no longer that of preoccupation with the things it can buy —

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1. The Technological Society, p. 221.

2. Ibid., p. 66. "The gigantic effort at adjustment, the glorification of the extraverted individual, and the hatred of tensions and conflicts rests entirely on the idea that the only aim, the only sense, the only value in human life is happiness, and, further, on the conviction that the only means, the only road to happiness is comfort — material comfort (high living standard, reduction of work, absence of physical pain) and moral comfort (security, easily applicable doctrines and explanations, idealism). These values are the same in the Western and Communist worlds" (The Political Illusion, p. 208). This statement seems more applicable to Western than to Eastern materialism (especially that practised in Communist China). Elsewhere Ellul does distinguish between Communist and Capitalist materialism. In both cases man's true life is seen to have to do with production and consumption, but Capitalism represents "a suppression of being in personal having", whereas Communism represents "a suppression of being in collective doing and having" (L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 22). This distinction seems basically accurate, though, in the light of the continual Westernization of Russian Communism, not absolute. (Even Chinese Communism may be subject to Western influences. One notes with interest the fact that they have placed orders for supersonic aircraft.)

3. "L'Argent", pp. 39, 41-42, 48, 60.

4. Ibid., p. 60.

then money can be used to the glory of God and the service of man.[1] In the light of the fact that Ellul does recognize that money can assume a proper place in the Christian life, his basic thesis, that the relationship of man to money is that of slavery to the demonic, really applies only to the non-Christian relationship to money. For Christians money can cease from being an active subject — provided that Christians find freedom through bondage to Jesus Christ. Christ is precisely the Saviour who frees man from bondage to economic determinants.[2]

Though the stewardship use of money is important for Ellul, it is not the sole basis of his attitude toward money. Following the teachings of Jesus just discussed, he genuinely believes that money is a threat to man's relationship to God. He just reverses the modern commonplace that "the spiritual side of life cannot develop until the standard of living is raised."[3] Quite to the contrary, he believes that materialistic abundance hinders the spiritual life. While avoiding a legalistic interpretation which would define true Christian life as totally devoid of property, he believes that to choose God means to reject lesser gods, money included.[4] "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Mtt. 6:24). In keeping with his "One Kingdom" reasoning, he believes that the choice of God in opposition to money

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1. "L'Humilité Précède la Gloire," pp. 41-42.

2. See above, pp. 55-60, for a general discussion directly related to this entire chapter.

3. A Critique, pp. 179-195; see also The Technological Society, pp. 192, 338.

4. "L'Argent", pp. 37-38, 42.

is not merely a matter of inner attitude. It involves outward obedience as well.[1] "Where your treasure is [our underline] there will your heart be also" (Mtt. 6:21). The Bible habitually rejects the idea of a possible poverty in spirit when one is rich in terms of money."[2]

Unlike much Christian discussion of money and property (which focuses one-sidedly on the issue of stewardship), Ellul recognizes the threat which money poses to the human soul. He will not minimize this threat by saying that as long as man tithes or gives a large percentage of his income to help others — his affluence is no problem to his Christian existence. However, he recognizes that God the Creator is aware of man's need for material things in order to live (Mtt. 6:25-34).[3] His teaching on money is precisely an effort to come to terms with the demonic potentials of money, without lapsing into a simple ascetic denial of the goodness of creation. His interpretation of the story of the rich young man is very instructive at this point (Mtt. 19:16-26): "Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me'" (Mtt. 19:21).

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1. "L'Argent," pp. 38, 54.

2. L'Homme et l'Argent, p. 189. In I Tim. 6:10 we read, "The love of money is the root of all evils." Ellul will not accept any interpretation of this passage which spiritualizes the issue. If one does not love money, then one should not devote one's life to monetary accumulation. If one bases one's outward life on the quest for material abundance, this, for Ellul, is evidence that one's inner loyalty is in fact misdirected.
   Ellul's teaching is that natural man always has a false understanding of money. Both inwardly and outwardly, natural man loves money. In Ellul's view, only faith in Christ can bring deliverance from this false relationship with the material world.

3. "L'Argent," pp. 57-58. Though Mtt. 6:25-34 does not deal directly with the question of working and earning an income, it seems to assume the necessity and legitimacy of so doing. This being so, Mtt. 19:21 surely cannot mean that all Christians are simply to choose an ascetic life.

Ellul does not interpret this passage legalistically, as though all Christians simply should sell all of their possessions.[1] He does believe that the passage must be heard as a warning against directing our lives toward the acquisition of wealth. Though the saying does not establish God's concrete Word for individuals, it provides the general context in which that Word can be heard. Christians are to be warned of the dangers of wealth and of the dangers of even desiring to possess wealth.[2] (The saying is thus offensive to both rich and poor, for the poor often desire to be rich.) He believes that God is calling the Church to reject the way of life dictated by the quest for wealth.[3]

Ellul gives an even more specific description of what Christians ought to do with reference to money. Here one can see the very subtle way in which he is trying to do justice to the fact that Christians

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1. "L'Argent", p. 41. For examples of Ellul's rejection of legalism concerning the Christian use of money see above, p. 181 n. 2.

2. "When Jesus anathematizes the rich young man (that is, what modern society wants to make of each of us, to which end it invites us to employ our energies), he does not mean the man who could forsake his riches, but the one who has directed his energies toward the acquisition of wealth, that is, the very spirit of our society and our commonplace! For the fundamental question is much less that of Having (as opposed to Being) than that of 'Wanting to Have', by which the will subordinates Being to Having even when one has nothing. The problem is to know whether it is legitimate to direct all our vital energies toward 'Having More'!" (A Critique, p. 189).

3. Ellul's position is close to Barth's at this point (see above, p. 119, n. 2). Barth challenges Christians, especially those living in the materialistic West, to listen seriously to Jesus' teachings regarding wealth. He nevertheless refuses to give a legalistic interpretation to any of Jesus' words on wealth (Barth, IV/2, pp. 547-8). He believes that Jesus' teachings cannot be "reduced to a normative technical rule for dealing with possessions" (Barth, IV/2, p. 548). Barth tells us that we are not called to follow the rule of poverty as it was established in the monastic orders. Nor are we expected to build a new society freed from the principle of private property. In keeping with his covenant ethic, he believes that the command of God must be a concrete command claiming us here and now in individual ways (Barth, IV/2, p. 548).

should receive life in gratitude to God, but without becoming inwardly or outwardly absorbed in the things of the world. Referring to II Cor. 8:8-14, he argues that beyond using money for basic needs, Christians are to give it away, thus helping to establish equality[1] and desacralizing money.[2] Even with this more detailed direction, he is not giving a legalistic answer, since it is a matter of concrete obedience to perceive the precise dividing line between need and excess. Such a distinction does do justice to the New Testament teaching that the Christian response to the problem of wealth is no merely inward matter (Mtt. 6:21).

Ellul has several ways of giving further meaning to this basic distinction between need and excess. He says that Christians must not only help the poor, but must themselves assume a style of life which shows identification with the poor.[3] He is not romanticizing crippling and destructive poverty. He recognizes that there is a level of need, below which no man ought to live. However, he also recognizes that there is a level of luxury and overconsumption which likewise jeopardizes man's true life. In this regard he refers to Prov. 30:8-9: "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful to me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."[4] "The man of abundance ignores what is Eternal, he satisfies himself with what he possesses..."[5]

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1. "L'Argent", p. 61; L'Homme et L'Argent, pp. 173-174.
2. Violence, p. 166.
3. "The only attitude which Christianity can require is that of personal engagement. It is a question of oneself personally assuming the situation of the poor, that is, to be responsible before God. ... It is a question, in fact, of oneself becoming poor with the poor, with the Poor One" ("Le Pauvre", p. 125; see also L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 208; see above, pp. 138-139.
4. Cited in L'Homme et l'Argent, p. 171.
5. Ibid., p. 172.

Yet Ellul admits that poverty is also a great difficulty. "The relation with God is no more natural in poverty than in riches; the poor person is not better disposed: like the rich he comes across a temptation as difficult to surmount."[1]

Though Ellul recognizes the dangers of both wealth and poverty, he puts most of his emphasis on the dangers of the former. He says, for example, that the idea of ever-increasing production and consumption is not a Christian idea. Christianity is not concerned to increase consumption, "but to restrain it", to bring it back to a normal level. He believes that Christians must become discerning, making careful judgments concerning what the economy offers and eliminating the consumption of some things.[2] (One can see the ecological effect of Ellul's argument, an argument based on uniquely Christian premises.) Similarly, in opposition to overconsumption, he says that Christians must choose in favour of man and in opposition to the domination of things over man.[3] Christians must gain freedom from obsession with material comfort, diminishing the great importance attached to economic matters.[4] Freedom from material values also means freedom from the all-important value attached to earning money. He writes:-

> A Christian cannot, for example, teach his children that the ultimate value is work. He cannot offer to his children as the purpose of life to better one's position; making them live, as in so many bourgeois families ... So many students whom I have seen in my courses have always been raised with this idea that the thing which counts is to arrive, to have a good profession in society's eyes. That ... is an absolutely anti-Christian ascendency of work.[5]

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1. L'Homme et l'Argent, p. 173.
2. Pour une Economie, p. 56.
3. Ibid., p. 58; Man's Disorder, p. 56; "L'Argent", p. 50.
4. L'Homme Mesure, p. 17.
5. Pour une Economie, p. 53. An irony of the modern work ethic is that man works frantically to attain an ideal which is really the absence of work, but never being materially satisfied, continues to work harder.

Because for Ellul what is important is to serve the neighbour, the primacy of salary is devalued.[1] Though one must work in order to live, Christian work has to do with seeking to be obedient to God and has nothing to do with earning money.[2] He believes that only the Church can challenge materialism, because only the Church has the freedom to challenge the happiness ideology by which modern men live:-

> No one else calls in question the happiness of man which comes to him by riches, by power, by a greater comfort, by a larger consumption of goods. Humanists are in agreement with this direction. There is only the Church, not because it has any virtue, but because it can remember Jesus Christ.[3]

Ellul gives an elaborate exegetical discussion of the biblical meaning of the words "poor" and "rich". His discussion supports his view that Christians are not to take part in luxurious overconsumption. Christians are to be poor, in the threefold biblical sense of the word.

Ellul does not blame the modern work ethic on influences stemming from Christianity (A Critique, pp. 150-151). He recognises that Luther shared the values of his day concerning the primacy of work, but he thinks that Luther did not create those values, but that they had already begun in the 15th century. Ellul attributes the modern work ethic to secular influences beginning in the 15th century, but coming to full expression in the 19th century. He thinks that it was with the rise of bourgeois society that the work ethic came into real prominence (To Will and To Do, p. 195; "Work and Calling", pp. 9-10). "The technical movement of the West developed in a world which had already withdrawn from the dominant influence of Christianity" (The Technological Society, p. 35). Previously, Christianity had been able to apply moral and theological norms, which had the effect of retarding technical and material progress (ibid., pp. 37-8). He thinks that Marx later gave work an equally high valuation ("Work and Calling", p. 10). "Marx is a truly bourgeois thinker when he explains all of history by work, and when he formulates man's whole relation to the world in terms of work, when he evaluates all thought in terms of its relation to work, and when he gives work as the creative source of value" (A Critique, p. 154). It is Ellul's opinion that it was only with influences stemming from capitalism-technology-communism that work came to be exalted to the prime position it now holds (ibid., pp. 151ff.; The Technological Society, p. 219).

1. "L'Argent", pp. 52-3.
2. Ibid., p. 59.
3. Pour une Economie, pp. 51-2.

He begins to define the word "poor" by looking to Christ. He says that the Incarnation was precisely the coming of the Poor One.[1] Jesus Christ had nothing of Himself; He depended totally on God. Likewise, He preached the Good News to the poor.[2] From this Christological statement one can see two essential elements in Ellul's biblical understanding of the poor: the absence of material abundance and dependence on God.[3] The poor are both financially poor and poor in spirit, humble. "One must have an inner attitude of humility ..., an accord of the spiritual life and the material condition."[4] He insists that neither aspect of this definition can be isolated and still retain the biblical understanding. If one is financially rich, one's Christian spirituality suffers. However, the mere absence of material abundance does not establish faith. There is both a material and religious aspect to being poor.[5] An additional aspect of Ellul's biblical

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1. "Le Pauvre", p. 109.

2. Ibid., pp. 114-115.

3. Ellul refers to the difference between the Matthean and Lucan Beatitudes ("poor in spirit", "poor") as simply a reflection of the double meaning of the Hebrew word (Mtt. 5:3; Lk. 6:20) ("Le Pauvre," p. 112). Along similar lines, David Hill sees the economic aspect of poverty as implied in Matthew's words "poor in spirit", though of course the religious aspect is intended as well (David Hill, The Gospel of Matthew, New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1972), pp. 110-111).

4. "Le Pauvre", p. 111.

5. Ibid., pp. 110-111. When poverty is used to justify oneself before God it loses all worth. Thus in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Lk. 18:9-14) the Pharisee, though materially poor, is not justified by God (L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 196; see also The Politics of God, p. 26).

   Because poverty in the Christian sense is not the mere absence of money, Christians are not to romanticize physical poverty and resort to violence on the behalf of the poor, as though violence on their behalf is sacred. One cannot identify the Marxist proletariat with the poor in the Christian sense ("Le Pauvre", p. 117). Since the poor are those who hope in God, those who hope in human violence are from the biblical perspective among the rich, even if physically poor (ibid., p. 114).

   Ellul believes that many Christians today support violence because they believe that material want is the most important problem of life. "To the ideal of high consumption and the downgrading of spiritual values/...

definition of the poor is that they are just[1] (a point with a Christological basis as well). "Otherwise said, poverty is not a justification for sin. Sin remains sin even if it is accompanied by poverty."[2] To the degree that one sins one ceases to be poor in the biblical sense.[3]

In terms of this threefold definition of being poor, Ellul insists that God is on the side of the poor.[4] Likewise, he believes that the Bible opposes the rich (Jer. 5:27-29; James 5:1-6), by which he means any of the following or any combination of the following: those guilty of having more money than they really need, those who direct their energies toward the acquisition of wealth, those who feel self-sufficient and think they have no need of God's help, or those who victimize others.[5]

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values corresponds a conception of injustice that centers exclusively on the problem of consumption; and equality in consumption cannot be achieved except by violence" (Violence, p. 37). Ellul is not saying that the only reason Christians today support violence is because of an obsession that there be absolute material equality. He is only saying that this is one prevalent reason why people in general support violence and why many Christians do so. Even when Christians support violence for the sake of the elimination of injustice and exploitation (which of course often express themselves in material inequality), one must ask whether they may not often be supporting causes which to non-Christians have to do primarily with gaining equality of consumption.

1. L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 192.
2. "Le Pauvre", pp. 111-112.
3. Ibid., p. 112.
4. Ibid., p. 114.
5. L'Homme et L'Argent, pp. 41, 181-6, 201, 203-4; "Le Pauvre", p. 120; A Critique, p. 189. We should recall that Ellul does insist that the Church must preach to rich and poor alike ("Le Pauvre", p. 117; False Presence, p. 35). For him a degree of poverty is not a prerequisite for the receipt of the Gospel, but the style of life which constitutes a proper response to the Gospel. (There is a great deal of evidence which shows that Jesus had an openness to both rich and poor (Mtt. 8:5-13; Lk. 5:27-35; Lk. 7:1-10; Lk. 14:1; Lk. 18:9-14).) Apparently for Jesus a level of poverty was not seen as a prerequisite for the receipt of grace.

Christian Stewardship

Having seen that Ellul wishes to relativize money and does so by encouraging Christians to rid themselves of all money other than that which is truly necessary, we now need to see the connection between this relativizing of money and Christian stewardship. One obvious connection is negative. Christians are not to justify luxurious living on the grounds that by being wealthy they will be in better positions to help the poor. Though Ellul favours Christian stewardship, he rejects such luxurious accumulation, even if stewardship is claimed as the motive.[1] His whole theology stresses the importance of consistency between the Christian way of life and the Gospel proclaimed. If Christians are to witness to the fact that God has blessed the poor in Jesus Christ, they cannot do so if their own lives proclaim the gospel of wealth. Another negative conclusion is apparent. Though Christians are to help the poor to reach a level whereby their needs are satisfied, they are not to help them to become rich.[2] Christians are to help the poor, but are not to encourage a materialistic way of life. Christians are to seek to live in faithfulness to Jesus Christ — the One who both healed the sick and who warned of the dangers of excessive wealth.

We turn now to the positive aspect of Ellul's teaching on stewardship. He insists that property does not belong to man, but is entrusted to him for the purpose of being used in ways pleasing to God.[3] This being the case, Christians are not free to do as they like with

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1. L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 61.
2. Ibid., p. 209.
3. Pour une Economie, p. 56; L'Homme Mesure, pp. 17-18; L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 36.

the goods they "possess".[1] Beyond simply providing for the essentials of life, the Christian use of money is only for helping the poor.[2] (By this Ellul would surely include contributing money toward the proclamation of the Gospel.) Christians are to use money in this way quite simply because they believe that this is the Christian way of using money. In helping the poor Christians must have no feeling of virtue or merit.[3]

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1. Pour une Economie, p. 57. Commenting on Luke 16:1-13 G.B. Caird writes, "Worldly wealth is given to men on trust; it does not belong to them, but by their use of it they can show whether or not they are fit to be entrusted with real wealth, the wealth of the heavenly kingdom" (G.B. Caird, Saint Luke, p. 188). "All money, however acquired, is tainted unless it is used in God's service" (ibid., p. 189).

2. We have already spoken at length about Ellul's belief that the Church should seek to help the really poor (see above, pp. 138-143). We have already had occasion to criticize him for his one-sidedly personal understanding of the expression of Christian love (see above, pp. 197-208) and for his tendency to divorce Christian concern for the poor from support for programmes and institutions seeking to help the poor (see above, pp. 207-208). We believe that to limit Christian activity on the behalf of the poor in this way is unnecessarily to restrict the scope of love's concern.

3. "L'Argent", pp. 61-2; L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 60. Ellul refers to the parable of the last Judgment to make his point concerning the necessity of Christian concern on the behalf of the poor (Mtt. 25:31-46) (L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 201). "Our attitude with regard to the poor is a response to the question of God" (L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 201).

   Additional teachings of Jesus can be cited in defence of Ellul's position. Professor Hauck writes, "The only possibility for Jesus is the renunciation of earthly wealth as this is expressed in giving it to the poor. This ethically unobjectionable and religiously prudent use of earthly riches in the service of love for others is something which the righteous may learn from the ethically unjustifiable but clever use of money for corrupt purposes as this may be seen in the world (Lk. 16:1-7, 9)" (Hauck, Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Vol. IV, G. Kittel, ed., p. 390). Joachim Jeremias writes, "Again and again Jesus appeals for money to be given to the poor (Mark 10:21 par.; Matt. 6:4, 20; Luke 12:33); here we should remember that in the east 'almsgiving' is not a support for beggary, but the dominant form of social help. Jesus takes over the social demands of the prophets. As earlier, in the prophetic preaching, the divine right is the right of the poor" (Jeremias, New Testament Theology, Vol. 1, pp. 221-222).

Evaluation

Ellul has given a modern restatement of several teachings of Jesus which are all too easily ignored or softened by a Church living in a materialistically prosperous society. His interpretation of Jesus' teaching on wealth is not ascetic in the strict sense of the word. The Christian is not to flee from involvement in the material world; he is not to be ungrateful for God's creative and providential blessings, even those of a physical sort;[1] he is not to be indifferent to the suffering of those who live under the burden of poverty. Ellul's interpretation of Jesus' teaching and Jesus' teaching itself seem to us to have a touch of the ascetic about them. Money and the things that money can buy are seen to have a seductive power about them, which leads men to worship the creation, rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). Thus both inwardly and outwardly man is to seek to be freed from bondage to wealth, and to live at a material level which manifests this freedom. We believe that Ellul is correct in noting this ascetic aspect of Jesus' thought, and in seeing it as authoritative — in spite of the fact that it is often ignored. We especially think that Mtt. 6:21 ("Where your treasure is ...") underlines the point that allegiance to Christ should make a real difference in terms of the outward possession of wealth. Ellul's position is based on Scripture and what he perceives to be the Word of God in Scripture. He knows that what he has said is not easy to hear and is in fact an offence to everyone, himself included. Yet he does not believe that he has the freedom to deny what he believes to be the Word of God. He writes:-

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1. In support of this contention one recalls that Ellul does affirm that God the Creator knows that we have need of material things and provides for our needs (Mtt. 6:25-33) ("L'Argent", pp. 57-58). Similarly, he teaches that a parent's gift of money to his children can be a sign of genuine love (L'Homme et L'Argent, p. 160).

> I know that this runs exactly contrary to our interests and to our good intentions. This contradicts at the same time the rich and those who would like to enable the poor to become rich. This contradicts myself. But I believe that it is truly an affirmation of the Word of God, and I will hold it for as long as people have not shown me by Scripture itself that I have been wrong.[1]

We agree that Christian stewardship is a masquerade if Christians live in luxury while claiming to be concerned for the poor. Ellul's insistence that Christians are not only to help the poor, but to stand in identification with the poor is one of his most original contributions to the Christian conversation concerning wealth. Of course it is much easier to state the importance of a distinction between need and excess than it is to realize the difference in life.[2] (Ellul himself is quite aware that it is easier to talk about the Christian life than it is to live it.) Though it is a virtual certainty that most Christians in the West are guilty of living in affluence, it still is no easy matter to know exactly what does constitute a life freed from luxury. How broadly or narrowly is one to interpret need? Should aesthetic and educational considerations be

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1. "Le Pauvre", p. 127.

2. In the absence of some distinction between need and luxury Christian practice would be faulty. If there were not a level of need, below which people ought not to fall, Christians would have no responsibility to help raise the living standards of the poor. If there were no level of overconsumption to be avoided, Christians would simply help people from one problem (poverty) into another one (affluence).
   By interpreting New Testament teachings on wealth non-legalistically, Ellul is able to apply the New Testament directly to the changed situation of the twentieth century. It is true that his discussion focuses one-sidedly on individual responsibility and avoids the question of the relative worth of various economic systems. This is because Ellul does not think that Christianity can be identified with any economic system (it judges them all) and because he is convinced that many people today avoid individual responsibility because they expect economic systems to solve all of their problems concerning money (L'Homme et L'Argent, pp. 7-17, 24-29; "L'Argent", p. 29). His general political cynicism also influences his thought at this point; he has little confidence in either capitalist, socialist or communist remedies (L'Homme et L'Argent, pp. 20-24).

included in this category? Even at the level of the consumption of food, there is no easy formula as to what constitutes luxury. Does an occasional bottle of wine? What about an occasional steak? Can Christians in good conscience own cars, television sets, tape recorders, etc., etc.? When one starts thinking in terms of specific issues it becomes obvious that the distinction between need and excess cannot itself give precise answers to the question, "What ought the Christian to do?" There are no general and timeless answers to such a specific question. Ellul's distinction is not intended to offer any such specific answers; such answers would be distasteful to him, on the grounds that they would constitute casuistry pure and simple. What he is seeking to do is to sound a warning, so that Christians will begin to think seriously about the concrete way in which their outward lives should be shaped to conform to the Gospel. He is not claiming that there is some easy way to know, let alone to practise, the distinction between need and luxury. He is only claiming that Christians as individuals should struggle to be concretely obedient in ways which seek to make good the distinction as it works out in their own lives.[1] Though the realisation of his distinction would be no easy matter and though the shape of obedience would vary from individual to individual and from society to society,[2] we still think that the recognition of some such distinction is a necessary first step toward the responsible Christian use of money.

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1. We could restate the distinction in another way. Insofar as material things genuinely help Christians to prepare to serve, they are to be used. Insofar as they do not help, they are to be rejected. Again, this restatement does not answer specific questions as to what Christians ought to do.

2. At the present time in the United States, owing to the inadequacies of public transportation and the scattered nature of congregations, it is impossible for many clergymen to visit the homes of their parishioners if the clergymen do not own cars.

If Christians were to strive to realize a distinction between need and luxury, they would have to undertake the painful task of distancing themselves from the society in which they live (be that in the East or in the West). Such a distancing from the world's values would inevitably lead to persecution and suffering, since to call in question the materialism of the world would seem like madness to those preoccupied with material values. The ethical position Ellul espouses is never easy — in fact it is always so difficult that Christians cannot possibly accomplish what is called for. The only question is whether Ellul is right in his interpretation of Scripture and whether the Christian God is the resource adequate to meet the severe demands that His Scripture lays upon Christians.

Though Ellul is severe at this point, he is not harsh. He is well aware that the Church in the West is bourgeois and he is not claiming that because she is so she is not the Church.[1] Likewise, his understanding of the Christian faith is such that it is not seen to be first and foremost moral demand, but divine forgiveness. Even so, Ellul is still trying to help rich Christians to recognize that their riches are getting in the way of their relationship to God and their service to men. While preaching the same sermon to himself, he is calling the Church to repentance in this concrete way.[2]

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1. False Presence, p. 35.
2. "Le Pauvre", p. 116.

CHAPTER IX

CHAPTER IX

THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE

In illustrative ways we already have had occasion to refer to Ellul's view on violence. In this chapter we will seek to give a systematic statement of his position, utilizing earlier scattered references, but going into the topic in greater depth. As we do so, we will see that what he says concerning the issue of violence is really the application of many of the major theological points we have previously seen to be essential to his thinking.

We will be concerned to deal with the breadth of Ellul's social and theological thought on the issue of violence. (His analysis of the nature of violence is based on both sociological and theological factors.) However, it is our view that his normative position can stand on its own, even if, for various reasons, we do not find his analysis of the nature and consequences of violence to be entirely convincing. We will first discuss his social and theological analysis of the nature and consequences of violence and secondly will consider his normative theological response to violence.

Ellul defends the importance of Christian realism as the approach appropriate to "social ethics" and to the issue of violence. By Christian realism he means the practice of seeing the facts without illusion or evasion and the willingness to gauge the probable consequences of action.[1] He is not advocating the practice of deriving Christian

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1. Violence, pp. 81-2. "Now, I have been studying the problem of violence (especially violence as practiced today) for a long time, and on several occasions have played some role in violent actions. So I can state that what is most lacking in this regard among my brother Christians is neither good will nor charity, neither concern for justice nor dedication, neither enthusiasm nor willingness to make sacrifices -- none of these; what is lacking is realism. Where violence/...

principles of action from an analysis of social reality.[1] Quite to the contrary, he believes that Christ grants freedom from bondage to the sinful order of necessity. In the case of violence, he sees the Christian response as involving a direct challenge of the facts of the world (violence as an order of necessity). Likewise, his assessment of the results of violence is so pessimistic that it discourages conduct adjusted to social reality.

Violence: An Order of Necessity[2]

Ellul sees violence as an aspect of the fallen order of necessity. (The order of necessity describes the conditions which result from man's sinful separation from God.)[3] Though from a Christian perspective he sees violence as contrary to Christian freedom and obedience, he thinks that it is an inescapable reality for the sinful world, which must of necessity operate on the basis of its non-Christian assumptions.[4] He

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violence is concerned, Christians generally behave like imbecile children. And I do not believe that stupidity is a Christian virtue. On the other hand, intelligence is obviously not an absolute requirement, but realism as I have tried to define it is. I shall cite only one text: 'But Jesus did not trust himself to them, ... for he knew what was in man' (John 2:24-25) — though this certainly did not keep him from giving his life for these same men!" (Violence, pp. 83-4; see also pp. 122-125).

1. Ibid., p. 83.

2. Ellul believes that to point out the radically violent nature of society is a Christian judgment made possible by the courage acquired through faith in Christ (ibid., p. 91). We recall our earlier discussion of his understanding of the relationship between eschatological hope and Christian realism (see above, pp. 66-68).

3. Ibid., p. 128.

4. Ibid., p. 91; "Correspondence," Christianity and Crisis XXX (Oct. 19, 1970), p. 221. "I am not saying that violence is an expression of human nature. I am saying, for one thing, that violence is the general rule for the existence of societies — including the societies that call themselves civilized but have only camouflaged violence by explaining and justifying it and putting a good face on it. I am saying also that when a man goes the way of violence he enters a system of necessities and subjects both himself and others to it" (Violence/ ...

speaks of violence as a reality so common and widespread throughout history that it can be compared with physical laws, such as gravitation.[1] He thinks that violence is a part of the natural order of the world. "Since the days of Cain, there has been no beginning of violence, only a continuous process of retaliation. ... When a man is born, violence is already there, already present in him and around him."[2] "Wherever we turn, we find society riddled with violence. Violence is its natural condition, as Thomas Hobbes saw clearly."[3] The natural way of life is to conform to the order of violence.[4]

That society is plagued by violence is, for Ellul, a sociological judgment which he sees confirmed by Scripture. As for the scriptural observation of the same, he says that Jesus Christ told us of the violent nature of the world when he said, "'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercize authority over them'"(Mtt. 20:25).[5] One wonders if Ellul has not overinterpreted this passage in a way which corresponds to his own sociological view that government can only employ the means of violence. He says that "Violence is not only the means the poor use to claim their rights;

(Violence, p. 92). "As violent persons, we are fully conformed to the world. Violence is one of the 'rudiments' (stoicheia) of this world" (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 174).

1. Violence, p. 129.

2. Ibid., p. 100.

3. Ibid., p. 87. Having argued that violence is of the order of necessity, it seems a curious inconsistency to blame violence on the Christians' failure to be good missionaries. Ellul does precisely this when he writes, "If violence is unleashed anywhere at all the Christians are always to blame" (ibid., p. 156). If violence is as widespread as he here suggests, it also seems inconsistent to see war as a function of the city (The Meaning of the City, p. 51; see above, p. 25).

4. Violence, pp. 91-2.

5. Ibid., p. 93.

it is also the sole [my underline] means available to those in places of power."[1] The scriptural passage does imply that worldly rulers must of necessity use methods of violence; however, it does not say that these are the sole means at their disposal.

As we move from Ellul's biblical statement to consider his modern sociological observation, he seems similarly to have overstated the degree to which the world is ruled by violence. (Since he elsewhere argues that some non-Christian acts can be objectively in agreement with God's intention, we see no theological necessity for this overstatement.) We can agree that the relationship between the classes necessarily involves a degree of violent competition for the attainment of wealth. We can agree that it is only natural that this is so, since there is no reason why the lower classes should be willing to accept upper-class domination.[2] Unfortunately, Ellul goes much further, writing that "Economic relations, class relations, are relations of violence, nothing else" [my underline].[3] It simply does not seem empirically true that

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1. Violence, p. 93.

2. Ibid., p. 87.

3. Ibid., p. 86; see p. 110. This sweeping statement seems to apply to all economic systems. Ellul specifically criticizes the capitalist system of free competition, but he also says that the planned economy also involves violence (ibid., p. 86). If violence is an order of necessity, every human economic arrangement will necessarily involve violence. (Our question is simply whether there are not important degrees of violence, even within particular economic systems.)

It would be beyond the scope of this work to enter into the interesting question of the relative merits of various economic systems. Though Ellul seems to have a human preference on this matter, his opinion does not appear to inform his Christian ethic. He explicitly states that he prefers socialism, but at most places even this relative preference is hard to discern. His cynicism concerning all economic systems is stronger than his preference for any (Propaganda, pp. 222-223; Violence, p. 32; A Critique, p. 21). He can even write, "Undoubtedly the problem of poverty can be solved. But nothing indicates that it can be more easily solved under Socialism than under capitalism" (Propaganda, p. 222). Ellul's Christian ethic is applicable to Christians living under any and every economic system. It is also the case that though he seems to prefer socialism, he sees technology/...

economic relations and class relations involve nothing but violence.

When Ellul describes the state as necessarily employing violence, he makes a legitimate observation, but he expresses his point so as to imply that states can use no means other than those of violence. He is surely correct in his observation that states are established by acts of violence and are recognized as states when they have had the power to stay in existence for a reasonable period of time.[1] He points out that the first task of any would-be state is to establish order in the street. Only later can a legal system be established. Also, he thinks that if any situations arise which threaten the existing order, "emergency laws" are enacted whereby the state simply resorts to violence to save itself.[2] It seems true that Christians ought not to tell states never to employ force, since such advice would involve the outright rejection of every state, past and present.[3] Such advice

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technology as the real menace common to all modern economic systems (Presence of the Kingdom, pp. 36, 121). Whether or not the workers own the means of production is to him a less important issue than the dehumanizing effect of technique on modern man (The Technological Society, pp. 197-198; Propaganda, pp. 222-223). Assembly line work is boring and dehumanizing whether done in a capitalist, socialist, or communist society.

1. Violence, pp. 84-5. As an example of the way in which the United States was established and is maintained by violence Ellul refers to the slow and "sanctimonious extermination of the Indians, the system of occupying the land (Faustrecht), the competitive methods of leading capitalist groups, the annexation of California along with the retrieval of Texas", not to mention Negro slavery(ibid., p. 88).

2. Ibid., pp. 85-6; The Political Illusion, p. 74.

3. "To say that the state should not employ force is simply to say that there should be no state. It is the same with regard to war. To the extent that the state is charged with ensuring the survival of the social group that it leads and represents, it cannot avoid war" (ibid., p. 76). "To demand that a non-Christian state should refrain from using violence is hypocrisy of the worst sort; for the Christian position derives from the faith, and moreover he exercises no responsible political function. To ask a government not to use the police when revolutionary trouble is afoot, or not to use the army when the international situation is dangerous, is to ask the state to commit hara-kiri. A state responsible for maintaining order and defending/...

would also involve the Christian in the confusion of demanding that non-Christians conduct themselves in Christian ways. We are prepared to admit that violence is an aspect of every society and is present at every point in society's development. Ellul, however, is not content to leave matters here, but goes on to say that the only means available to governments are those of violence. How does he say that a government stays in power? "By violence, simply by violence. It has to eliminate its enemies."[1] In democratic countries one would think that governments would have to attain certain goals pleasing to the people. Thus, one would think that governments could not stay in power simply by the use of violence. Ellul can counter that even in democracies, governments stay in power by the use of propaganda, a form of violence. To argue as he does, that governments don't at all reflect the interests of the voters, but simply mould public opinion to reflect the government's concerns, seems an exaggeration.

The Laws of Violence

Having established that violence is an inevitable aspect of all societies, having seen the facts, Ellul goes on to develop the second aspect of his realism as applied to violence. He examines the consequences of violence[2], and describes the consequences in terms of various "laws of violence."[3] Just as we have had occasion to criticize

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defending the nation cannot accede to such a request" (Violence, p. 159). "I can say that all war is unjust and all force to be condemned. But this is a matter for the moralist or the individual; the state cannot possibly judge in this fashion. It would simply condemn itself to disappear and to be replaced by another state that would show less compunction to use force" (The Political Illusion, p. 77).

1. Violence, p. 85; see also p. 93.

2. Ibid., p. 93.

3. Ellul gives a short summary of the meaning of these sociological laws/...

the overdrawn way in which he describes the violent nature of the world, so we will need to criticize his laws of violence. Though we find a great deal of truth implied in these laws, we believe that Ellul has in most cases pushed the truth further than it will really go.

The first of Ellul's laws of violence which we will discuss is that of sameness. His basic point concerning this law is that "all kinds of violence are the same."[1] "Violence is hubris, fury, madness. There are no such things as major and minor violence. Violence is a single thing, and it is always the same."[2] Because he regards all forms of violence as similar, he refuses to distinguish between justifiable and unjustifiable violence.[3] He refuses to evaluate violence on the basis of the goals to which it is committed, rejecting the assumption that particular moral ends justify the means of violence. He lumps in the same category the physical violence of "the soldier who kills, the policeman who bludgeons, the rebel who commits arson, the revolutionary who assassinates."[4] In the same category with physical violence he includes economic violence,

> the violence of the privileged proprietor against his workers, of the 'haves' against the 'have-nots'; the violence done in international economic relations between our own societies and those of the Third World; the violence done through powerful corporations which exploit the resources of a country that is unable to defend itself.[5]

His reasoning here is based not only on modern sociological observation, but on Jesus' refusal to draw a distinction between being angry and murdering (Mtt. 5:21-22), which Ellul understands as a sociological

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laws. He says that violence "necessarily produces new violence, and that situations created by violence are never just" ("Correspondence," p. 221).

1. Violence, p. 97.
2. Ibid., p. 99.
3. Ibid., p. 97.
4. Ibid., p. 97.
5. Ibid., p. 97.

observation about the sameness of violence in the world at large.[1]

From the above statements we can see that one aspect of Ellul's law of sameness is his emphasis on the violent nature of subtle forms of violence. It is his view that velvet-gloved violence can be just as violent as the ironhanded variety. He condemns psychological forms of violence, such as

> propaganda, biased reports, meetings of secret societies that inflate the egos of their members, brainwashing, or intellectual terrorism. In all these cases the victim is subjected to violence and is led to do what he did not want to do, so that his capacity for further personal development is destroyed. Psychological violence, though it seems less cruel than the policemen's bludgeon, is in fact worse, because the reaction it stimulates does not take the form of pride or self-assertion.[2]

He even argues that the psychological violence employed by all countries is the worst form of violence, "because it lays hold of the whole man, and, without his knowing it, gelds him."[3]

Though we doubt that Mtt. 5:21-22 can legitimately be used to make the above point, we have no basic quarrel with the notion that subtle forms of violence are indeed violent. This aspect of Ellul's argument could help Christians to repent of involvement in forms of

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1. Violence, p. 99.

2. Ibid., p. 97.

3. Ibid., p. 98. "The velvet-gloved violence of the powerful who maintain the regimes of injustice, exploitation, profiteering, and hatred has its exact counterpart in the iron-fist violence of the oppressed. Likewise the violence of nations, be they weak or powerful, encourages violence in their people. When a nation — as all European nations do — trains its young men in the most extreme kinds of violence in order to prepare them for battle (parachutists, etc.), the result is bound to be that the whole nation imitates this violence" (ibid., p. 98). Among the varieties of violence Ellul includes: "psychological manipulation, doctrinal terrorism, economic imperialism, the venomous warfare of free competition, as well as torture, guerrilla movements, police action. The capitalist who, operating from his headquarters, exploits the mass of workers or colonial peoples is just as violent as the guerrilla ..." (ibid., p. 130).

violence which are easily overlooked by those who merely criticize physical violence. Though Ellul seems to single out psychological violence as worse than other forms of violence, it is clear that his basic point is the similarity of both subtle and more overt forms of violence.

Not only is Ellul arguing for the essential similarity of subtle and overt forms of violence, he is also saying that all forms of physical violence are identical. He thus rejects any distinction between violence and force, the latter being legitimate and justified because it is undertaken by the state.[1] At this point we think Ellul's position must be subjected to severe criticism. We agree that states are established by violence[2] and to some degree are maintained by the same.[3] We also agree that much that has been justified as the state's exercize of legitimate force really falls under the heading of violence pure and simple. But is all force employed by the state to be so categorized and condemned? We think not.

To make this identification of all force with violence Ellul appeals to Mtt. 5:21-22. He writes, "This passage is no 'evangelical counsel for the converted'; it is purely and simply, a description of the nature of violence."[4] Quite to the contrary, we think that this passage is precisely what he claims it is not. It seems to be a normative statement of what Matthew understood as a requirement of Jesus for Christians. It does not seem to be a sociological description of

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1. Violence, p. 84.
2. The fact that states are established by violence does not prove that all future acts of force committed by states so established are necessarily violent in the same sense.
3. Violence, pp. 84-85.
4. Ibid., p. 99.

reality; in fact, it does not even seem to refer to society. Jesus' obliteration of the distinction between anger and murder radicalizes the meaning of obedience for Christians. It is unlikely that this teaching was intended to obliterate all social distinctions between different forms of violence in the social order.

Not only does Mtt. 5:21-22 seem to be incapable of establishing the sameness between force and violence, but Rom. 13 and parallel passages seem to imply the very distinction Ellul is attempting to use Mtt. 5:21-22 to refute. Though we think that Rom. 13 is much too flattering concerning the state, it nevertheless seems to contain an element of truth. When the Christian thinks of physical violence in society (as contrasted with the question of whether the Christian can use violence), he finds that some forms of violence are justified, because of the end sought. Though the police may indeed employ illegitimate violence, they can also use legitimate force, when seeking to protect the common good of society from the outbreak of criminal violence.[1] Ellul, to the contrary (and unlike Paul), assumes that even legitimate police action is of the same nature as all other forms of

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1. Of course there is such a thing as police brutality (Violence, p. 85) and we think that there is a great deal of it today. All we are saying is that not all violent action by the police can be so categorized. By the law of sameness, the thief who kills hostages and fires on unarmed civilians is no more guilty than the policeman who fires back to protect society.

   In rejecting the idea that there are two kinds of violence, Ellul says that "violence operates only for the good of its users" (ibid., p. 110). This would mean that policemen resort to violence only for their own sake!

   Ellul confuses his own argument concerning the sameness of violence by saying that all violence is the same because violence provckes counter-violence, which in turn necessitates greater violence. Because he regards this to be the case, he says that violence knows no limits and hence condoning violence in one form means condoning all other forms (ibid., p. 98). The police use of force may have the effect of provoking counter-violence on the part of the criminals. However, it seems even truer that the absence of all force on the part of the police would provoke the greatest violence of all — virtual mob rule!

violence.[1] Using Rom. 13, one can argue that the violence committed by a hijacker, endangering innocent lives, is different from that of a policeman who, in an effort to protect the passengers, is forced to shoot the hijacker. It's not just that common sense seems to recognize the difference between various forms of physical violence — Scripture itself sees the difference. Of course, this is not to say that the Christian as such can in good conscience be involved in violence. It is to say that the Christian attitude toward violence in society need not be as simplistic as Ellul suggests.

A second law of violence is that of continuity. The point here is very simple: "Once you start using violence, you cannot get away from it."[2] To resort to violence is a way of simplifying situations and Ellul thinks that this habit once learned cannot be quickly broken.[3] He goes on to use language which states that the habit of violence once learned cannot be broken at all. "Once a man has begun to use violence he will never stop using it, for it is so much easier

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1. Violence, pp. 84, 97-99, 130. Earlier in Ellul's career he had seen a positive role for the use of force by the state. At that time he believed that some use of force by the state is legitimate, since the state is charged with sustaining the life of the nation. Referring to the state he wrote, "It has received the sword, and we know how the use of this weapon is justified. The state is charged with making law effective, supporting law by force. Law simply cannot be conceived of without enforcement by an outside authority"(Theological Foundation of Law, p. 125). As his sociological pessimism increased over the years, his ability to distinguish between shades of grey seems to have decreased.
   Ellul elsewhere wrote that the state is"charged by God with the responsibility of punishing evil" ("Rappels et Réflexions", p. 166). Having recognized this insight, it is strange that he affirms this law of sameness, which has the effect of denying the obvious implication of the Pauline teaching — the possibility that certain forms of state violence are justified because of the goals to which they are dedicated.
2. Violence, p. 94.
3. Ibid., p. 94.

and more practical than any other method. It simplifies relations with the other completely by denying that the other exists."[1] Ellul thinks that this reasoning applies not only to individuals but to nations. He thinks that revolutionary movements learn the habit of violence; thus, when they come to power they become violent like the reactionary governments they have overthrown:-

> The Marxist idealists are simply naive when they believe that, once a reactionary government has been overthrown by violence, a just and peaceful regime will be established. Castro rules only by violence, Nasser and Boumedienne likewise; there is no difference at all between their regimes and the previous colonialist regimes that they ousted by violence.[2]

Ellul himself was a "freedom fighter" who has now become an advocate of non-violence. To say that once an individual has used violence he cannot cease using it, is to minimize the significance of repentance. Perhaps Ellul's language is not to be taken literally. He may simply mean that the habit of violence once learned is not easily set aside. Stated this way there is a great deal of truth to what he says, at least at the individual level.

On the social-political level one can see that Ellul is rebelling against the Marxist doctrine that a kingdom of peace can come about through violent means. Since he has already argued that every government maintains itself by violence, he certainly cannot agree with the Marxists' claim that once they are in power peace will reign. By talking of the acquisition of the habit of violence, he apparently is describing one of the ways in which violence perpetuates itself within all states.[3]

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1. Violence, p. 94.
2. Ibid., p. 94.
3. Of course, for Ellul the difficulties are deeper than the establishment of the habit of violence. On his terms governments must of necessity employ violence.

The third law of violence we will discuss is really but an amplification of the law of continuity. The main point here is likewise to refute the Marxist claim that violence can create a just and peaceful society.[1] This is unlikely because violent revolutionaries, having learned the habit of violence, bring about a reign of violence, when they become statesmen. He does not give a title to this law, but instead simply states it: "Violence begets violence — nothing else."[2] It is understandable that violence cannot itself create justice and peace, the latter being a political rather than a military task. The confusion in Ellul's thought is whether violent revolution can even be instrumental in the eventual[3] creation of a society which has a higher degree of justice than the previous one. His language at this point is not clear, since he can be quoted on both sides.[4]

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1. Violence, p. 101. "Violence can never realize a noble aim, can never create a liberty or justice. ... Violence will never establish a just society" (ibid., p. 102).

2. Ibid., p. 100. Ellul's language here is so similar to the language he uses for the fourth law of violence (violence provoking counter-violence) that it is easy to confuse this law and see it as an aspect of the law of reciprocity. Of course, all of the laws of violence interrelate and it is hard to draw a line between one and the other. Nevertheless, we think that the main similarity is with the law of continuity. Though violence begets the reaction of counter-violence, his main point here is that this counter-violence once learned is not easily set aside. Because this is so, violent revolutionaries who come to power are unlikely to be less violent than the statesmen they eliminate.

3. Even if revolutionaries do not themselves make good politicians, this does not disprove the possibility that the eventual results of a revolution can be an improvement in the political order. This is not to claim that the eventual results of revolution usually are positive, only that they may be.

4. In opposition to the idea that violence can even be instrumental in the creation of a relatively better society, one can quote the following: "Let us then ask what, concretely, is the result, the actual result of 'legitimate, liberating' violence. It is plain that in every case this violence has in fact led to establishing a greater violence. ... What did Algeria's National Liberation Front achieve by its use of violence? Elimination of the French, of course; but also an economic recession, the establishment of a dictatorial state, a false and altogether regressive socialism, and the/...

Since there is a seeming contradiction in his thought at this point, it is perhaps best to read his words as a general warning. Ellul, as a student of history, knows that revolutionary movements when they come to power are seldom improvements over the regimes they have ousted.[1] In general terms, he regards this as factually true and hence states what he regards as the facts of the matter. He is also saying that violence as such never creates a just society. It seems unlikely

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the condemnation of all who had participated in the violent struggle, because they proved completely unfitted for conducting a rational government" (Violence, pp. 110-111). "Institutions established through 'just' violence are never an improvement" (ibid., p. 114). "Whenever a violent movement has seized power it has made violence the law of power. The only thing that has changed is the person who exercises violence. No government established by violence has given the people either liberty or justice — only a show of liberty ... And I am speaking not only of the revolutions of 1789, 1917, or 1933, or the revolutions of Mao, Nasser, Ben Bella, Castro, what I say above is true also of 'liberal' or 'democratic' governments (I have cited the U.S.A. as an example)" (ibid., p. 101).

Ellul makes one statement on the law of reciprocity which also implies that the political order which comes about as a result of violence is necessarily worse than the one which preceded it. He writes, "The violence of the colonialists creates the violence of the anticolonialists, which in turn exceeds that of the colonialists" (ibid., p. 95).

While recognizing that the only certain result of violence is the provocation of counter-violence, Ellul elsewhere admits that violence may sometimes be instrumental in the later political procurement of such values as "equal rights" (ibid., pp. 96-7). He speaks of violence as that which can create "a state of disorder out of which (depending on how fluid the situation is) renewal may issue" (ibid., p. 133). That is, though violence cannot itself create order and justice, the latter may in some cases flow as the result of political activity made possible because of revolution.

1. Ellul's position is related to his own experience of recent French history. He writes, "The French resistance to Nazism aimed to create a free and just republic. In 1945, the same resisters massacred 45,000 people in Sétif in Algeria, and in 1947 they massacred almost 100,000 in Madagascar" (ibid., p. 102). "The French and Italians were held in check by the Nazi occupation. The moment they were liberated, their violence exploded, and they perpetrated crimes and torturings that imitated the atrocities of the Germans. I am bound to say that I see no differences at all between the Nazi concentration camps and the camps in which France confined the 'collaborators' in 1944 ..." (ibid., p. 96).

that he really intends to say that the birth of a nation never leads eventually to an improved situation.[1]

It seems more likely that what he means is that there is no necessity that a new nation will be an improvement and many factors work against the likelihood (the laws of violence).

A fourth law of violence is that of reciprocity. Here Ellul is thinking not of the creation of a habit, but the provocation of counter-violence by those against whom violence is directed. ("Violence creates violence.")[2] He thinks that the only certain result of violence is "the reciprocity and the reproduction of violence."[3] Violence creates counter-violence, which in turn necessitates an escalation of violence.[4] "The man who, in whatever way, uses violence should realize that he is entering into a reciprocal kind of relation capable of being renewed indefinitely."[5] Ellul claims to have learned this sociological law from Jesus' words, "'All who take the sword will perish by the

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1. If one is not willing to de-literalize Ellul's words in this way, one must criticize that side of his thought where he seems to say that violence can never be instrumental in the creation of a society with a higher degree of justice than previously realized. It simply does not seem empirically true that every time a new nation has been formed, that nation has always become more violent than the previous one. In some situations violence seems to have been an instrument in ushering in a relatively better social order, for there are social orders which seem relatively better than others and all of them have been brought into existence through violence.
   If one really believes that with the establishment of a new nation greater violence is always in store, then such a belief would contribute to a particular view of history, whereby the world is seen as becoming progressively more degenerate. Since Ellul's apocalyptic view of history is not of this kind, we have additional evidence that his words on the issue under consideration should be de-literalized.
2. Violence, p. 95.
3. Ibid., p. 96.
4. Ibid., p. 98.
5. Ibid., p. 96.

sword'" (Mtt. 26:52).[1] He finds Jesus' statement confirmed by his own sociological study.[2] The reason that violence begets violence is the psychological fact that violence creates hatred in the recipients of violence, which eventually breaks out in retaliatory violence.[3] It seems to be true that violence does create resentment, which in turn leads to further acts of violence. This is indeed one reason why violence is such a widespread reality.

A fifth law of violence is that the man who uses violence seeks to justify himself and his violence. Ellul thinks that the reason so much effort is expended to justify violence is that violence as such is so unappealing.[4] More specifically, he believes that it is impossible to engage in violence without also hating the person or persons against whom violence is directed; yet men are not willing to admit such hatred. Justifications have to be invented to exonerate oneself, to make it seem to oneself and to others that the enemy is not really hated.[5] Contrary to this law of violence, Ellul's approach

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1. Violence, p. 95. Matthew alone records Jesus as having said the words which form the basis of Ellul's argument. It does seem that these words are not a form of moral command to disciples (cf. Mtt. 5:39), but a description of social reality. The text speaks of the futility and destructiveness of violence rather than its immorality. The reference must be to society rather than to individuals. Surely the early Church was not so naive as to understand these words individually, as though each person who kills will be killed.

2. Ellul refers to the violence of the blacks at Newark, which, though justified, provoked an even more severe system of repression than that against which they were originally rebelling (Violence, pp. 95-6).

3. Ibid., p. 96.

4. Ibid., p. 103.

5. Ibid., pp. 104-8. "The violence exercised by the French and American governments in Algeria and Vietnam, respectively, involves hatred, only in these cases the hatred is expressed by intermediaries. The head of the government can keep on declaring his good will, his objectivity, his freedom from hate, for he is not directly engaged in the military action. He can keep on pretending to pray and professing to love humanity. He can praise non-violence, as President Johnson did when Martin Luther King was assassinated. But all that is façade. A ruler/...

is never to give an air of legitimacy to violence. "Christians should never offer a spiritual justification for an action or situation of pure necessity."[1]

We have found typical Ellulian overstatements in this discussion of Christian realism concerning violence. Concerning both the facts of violence and the consequences of violence, we have had occasion to criticize these formulations. It's not that we think that Ellul is simply wrong on these points — it's just that his formulations go further than the biblical and sociological evidence seems to permit. We now move from an analysis of the nature and consequences of violence to a discussion of Ellul's normative Christian response to violence.

Christian Freedom from the Violent Order of Necessity

We have seen previously that Ellul believes that violence is an order of necessity. He thinks "that violence is the general rule for the existence of societies";[2] he thinks that violence is a reality so common in the world that its existence is comparable to physical laws.[3] Ellul, however, does not believe that the universality of a phenomenon establishes its legitimacy, that what is natural is necessarily good.[4] Though he recognizes the all-pervasive reality of violence, he sees it as a part of that sinful way of life from which Christ grants freedom.[5]

A ruler has to save face and show that he is a well-disposed man; he has to justify himself!" (Violence, pp. 104-5).

1. "Correspondence," p. 221.
2. Violence, p. 92.
3. Ibid., p. 129.
4. Ibid., p. 128; To Will and To Do, p. 46; Theological Foundation of Law, pp. 11-12. "Necessity does not establish legitimacy" (Propaganda, p. xv).
5. "For the role of the Christian in society, in the midst of men, is to shatter fatalities and necessities. And he cannot fulfill this role by using violent means, simply because violence is of the order of necessity. To use violence is to be of the world" (Violence, p. 129).

Jesus recognized the violent nature of the world, but also went on to teach that this is not to be the way of life for disciples.[1] Likewise, Ellul teaches that violence is normal and natural, but that Christ grants freedom from this bondage.[2] The exegetical assumption behind his rejection of violence because it is of the order of necessity is that violence is of the sinful order of necessity. His language itself often does not make this point,[3] but it is surely assumed. If we are permitted to deliteralize his words about rebellion against the violent order of necessity, we can restate his intention as follows: Christians are to rebel against the order of necessity which includes violence, because violence is a sinful expression of man's fallen condition. This modified way of expressing Ellul's thesis does justice to his absolute Christian opposition to violence, while making sense of the fact that he does recognize that Christians can sometimes (and perhaps often) agree with non-Christians at the level of specific action.

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1. "'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercize authority over them. It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many'" (Mtt. 20:25-28).

2. Violence, pp. 127, 129.

3. Ellul writes, "Therefore I say that only one line of action is open to the Christian who is free in Christ. He must struggle against violence precisely because violence is the form that human relations normally and necessarily take" (ibid., p. 127). "The better we understand that violence is necessary, indispensible, inevitable, the better shall we be able to reject it and oppose it. If we are free in Jesus Christ, we shall reject violence precisely because violence is necessary" (ibid., p. 130; see also p. 146). To understand these words properly we must remember that Ellul has defined the order of necessity as the order of separation from God (ibid., p. 128). Though the force of gravity is a fact of life, it is not a part of the "order of necessity", because it is not the expression of sin. We think that Ellul basically opposes violence because he regards it as contrary to God's will, not because it is a fact of life.

Non-Violence as Based on Uniquely Christian Premises

Ellul's attitude toward violence is not only based on his conviction about the freedom which comes through the receipt of grace. His position is also related to his understanding of the unique nature and purpose of the Christian life, his belief that Christian conduct should be the expression of the Gospel to which Christians adhere.[1] Ellul writes, "The Holy Spirit will give true power and efficacy only to means which are in exact agreement with the actual content of the gospel."[2] He thinks that Christians who endorse violence are not introducing a uniquely Christian perspective into their environment, but are rather conforming to their social milieu.[3] He believes that

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1. He affirms both a social realism and a Christian perfectionism when he writes, "The man who does not know freedom in Christ cannot understand the word of freedom Paul spoke in the midst of necessity: 'We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.' (II Corinthians 4:8-9). Such a man thinks that in this situation Paul should have used other means — violence in particular. We must accept and try to understand this man who does not know Christ's freedom. But let us distinguish clearly between him and the man who has known Christ and calls himself a Christian. The latter cannot be excused if he uses violence for his own ends. So, too, the capitalist or the colonialist who exploits and oppresses his fellow men, and the government leader who uses police or military violence, are to be radically condemned" (Violence, p. 131).

2. The Politics of God, p. 136.

3. Violence, pp. 46, 66, 69, 147. Ellul's basic criticism of those Christians who today advocate revolution is that they are basically conforming to worldly trends. He thinks they accept the fact of revolution as a fate and Christianity becomes the variable that is modified accordingly (ibid., pp. 47, 51-56, 66, 71). Referring specifically to Richard Shaull, he accuses him of thinking that it is more important to be a revolutionary than to be a Christian (ibid., p. 54; Autopsie de la Révolution (1969), p. 261). He accuses Shaull of naiveté about the actual means of violence, when he assumes that the bloody methods of war accomplish God's humanizing work. Ellul believes that the means of revolution are such as to undermine the Christian goals of "forgiveness, freedom, justice and reconciliation", the goals Shaull claims are accomplished by revolution (Violence, pp. 55-6; Autopsie, pp. 261-2). "I say only that the act of torturing a human being, though it be intended to advance the noblest of causes, cancels out utterly all intentions and objectives" (Violence, p. 29). He says that Shaull fails to remember that "the Prince/...

Christians who advocate violence have forgotten the eschatological context in which their lives are to be lived.[1] As an historian and sociologist Ellul understands and sympathizes with the violent rebellion of the downtrodden, but he thinks Christian participation in violence is due to the failure to discern the uniquely Christian form of action.[2]

> What troubles me is that Christians conform to the trend of the moment without introducing into it anything specifically Christian. Their convictions are determined by their social milieu, not by faith in revelation; they lack the uniqueness which ought to be the expression of that faith. Thus theologies become mechanical exercises that justify the positions adopted, and justify them on grounds that are absolutely not Christian.[3]

He also believes that Christians have no excuse for agreeing to support violence. The fact that one may have to suffer for one's beliefs is seen by him to be no excuse at all. He very much resents the kind of reasoning which says that if a government has a draft system, then Christians have no choice but to support that system. He believes, to the contrary, that we can always choose non-violence if we are prepared to pay the price of suffering which our refusal may entail.[4]

The basic premise of Ellul's evangelical understanding of the purpose of the Christian life is that only conduct consistent with the Gospel can truly witness to it. Along the lines of this kind of perfectionism, he rejects the "Two Kingdom" kind of reasoning as applied to war. He rejects the notion that Christianity only has to do with inner dispositions, that one can kill and yet at the same time love the

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Prince of this world also has a finger in revolutions" (Violence, pp. 54-5; see also Autopsie, pp. 261-2). (Shaull's position is, of course, simply a repetition of Paul Lehmann's point of view.)

1. Violence, p. 150.
2. Ibid., pp. 26, 46, 69-70.
3. Ibid., p. 28.
4. A Critique, pp. 173-174.

one being killed. (He accuses the theologians of revolution of advocating this very kind of reasoning.) To the contrary, he says that since the Christian life has to do with love, it must not lead to acts contrary to love.[1] In his view, Christianity has a great deal to do with the choice of means and does not have to do merely with motives.[2]

At the basis of Ellul's opposition to the Christian use of violence is his conviction that Christians should trust the results of their action into God's keeping. The Christian task is to make a consistent witness to the Gospel in word and deed. Because the results can be entrusted to God, the Christian can be freed from resorting to the methods of violence to procure particular results.[3] He believes that God's intentional will is not accomplished through violence, but through sacrificial non-resistance which prepares the way for God's own action.[4]

Ellul's attitude toward violence is a classic example of his dual morality. Since Christians cannot require others to act as if they

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1. He believes that Christian love is precisely love for one's enemies, modelled on God's indiscriminate love in Jesus Christ (see above, pp. 195-197, for a fuller discussion of these issues).

2. "Théologie Dogmatique," pp. 146-147. Ellul sees prayer as the motivational basis for the Christian attitude and practice of non-violence. "Apart from prayer, action is necessarily violent and falsehood. ... Prayer is the only possible substitute for violence in human relations. Henceforth it is from prayer that one expects action to take its value. ... It is impossible to engage in the combat of prayer for the brother whom one loves in Christ, and still to employ physical and psychological violence against him. ... If we choose to use violence, so be it, but in that case let us stop playing the farce of prayer and love of neighbor" (Prayer and Modern Man, p. 173).

3. Violence, pp. 45-46, 149, 161, 170-1; Presence of the Kingdom, p. 80.

4. Violence, p. 13.

were Christians, he admits that non-violence is not to be expected or required of non-believers:-

> In so far as I firmly believe that faith in Jesus Christ requires action of a specific, unique, singular kind, I must admit that the counsels on violence issuing from faith are addressed to faith, therefore can have no meaning for those who do not believe that Jesus Christ is Lord. For example, we cannot expect non-Christians to bear oppression and injustice as we ought to bear them. So we cannot do as the Church has so often done: remind the world's oppressed (very few of whom are Christians) of their 'Christian duty' to submit and practice resignation.[1]

"The Christian's first act of non-violence is that he refrain from asking others to live as if they were Christian. When violence is in question, it is not our business to lecture them and urge them to be non-violent."[2] To ask non-believers to be non-violent would mean asking them to govern their lives on the basis of a divine authority which they do not accept.[3] Ellul thinks that Christians have a responsibility to try to limit the causes of violence[4] and he believes that Christians must themselves refrain from violence,[5] but he does not envision the Christian's verbal witness to Christ as extending to a criticism of the non-Christian's use of violence, unless it is an aspect of a directly Christian confession of faith.[6] He thinks that

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1. Violence, pp. 156-157. "We Christians must submit and bear unjust suffering; 'for if when you do right and suffer for it you take it patiently, you have God's approval' (I Peter 2:20). But we cannot make this a law for all men. We must accept injustice ourselves, but we can neither require others to bear it patiently nor serve as example for them, nor yet bear their suffering for them. That is to say, we cannot tolerate the injustice done others" (ibid., p. 157).
2. Ibid., p. 157.
3. Ibid., p. 157.
4. Ibid., pp. 157-8.
5. Ibid., p. 131.
6. Ibid., p. 159. Ellul on one occasion contradicts his view that non-violence only makes sense for Christians. He quotes Gandhi with approval and then says: "These words show that the way Christ appointed is open to all, that the victory of good over evil benefits not only Christians but non-Christians also" (ibid., p. 173).

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it is futile and not a Christian task to try to tell either secular governments or revolutionary groups that they ought not to use violence.[1] Though an advocate of Christian non-violence, Ellul as a Christian is a neutralist when it comes to violent power conflicts within society.[2]

Since non-Christians cannot be expected to behave according to Christian convictions, Ellul holds open absolutely no hope that society can be restructured along pacifist lines.[3] Nor does he believe that

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By referring to Gandhi, Ellul confuses his own argument concerning the sameness of violence. Gandhi's non-violent resistance was surely an exercise of force and thus would seem to fall under the broad and all-inclusive concept of violence Ellul has earlier enunciated and rejected. If one agrees with Gandhi's practices and even those of Martin Luther King (as Ellul seems to), then one is in effect accepting the legitimacy of some distinction between force and violence, the former being justified because of the goals sought (and perhaps because of the less violent methods used). Ellul sometimes seems to equate non-resistance and non-violent resistance, as when he refers to Gandhi as an exemplar of Christian non-violence. We think that Ellul's discussion of violence suffers from the failure to clarify this distinction.

Ellul says that if a statesman or president declares himself to be a Christian, the Christian should be able to call him to embody his faith. "It ought to be possible to tell a President Johnson that his faith forbids any use of violence" (Violence, p. 160). His argument here seems naive. It overlooks what he himself has said about the state necessarily having to use violence. It also ignores the propaganda reasons why many politicians claim religious loyalty of one sort or another, though that loyalty may be very nominal. Ellul may have his own doubts about the value of this suggestion, since he admits that to call a president to embody his Christian faith may in fact indicate that it is impossible to be a Christian and to conduct successful politics, for that would necessarily require the use of some form of violence (ibid., p. 160).

1. Ibid., pp. 157, 159.

2. Earlier in our work (see above, pp. 295-299) we saw that from a human perspective Ellul thinks that sometimes states should go to war, rather than waiting patiently while an aggressor prepares to crush them. This is his human reasoning; his Christian conviction is that all war is wrong.

3. When Ellul denies that non-violent action is effectual (ibid., p. 144), he apparently means simply that there is no hope that a pacifist social order can be established. "Their concern to show that their position is also efficacious lands pacifists in a position that, ultimately, is completely unrealistic. They would do better to declare the validity of non-violence without pretending that it is universally applicable" (ibid., pp. 15-16). He points out, for example/...

war can ever be totally prevented.[1] In keeping with his emphasis on the duality between the Church and the world, he denies that the New Order made possible in Christ is directly applicable to a non-believing world. However, he does recognize that Christian non-violence can have an indirect effect on society, though the possibility of such an effect is not to be the basis of Christian non-violence.

To understand the effect that Christian non-violence can have on society one must remember that governments need to have public opinion on their side, they need to have good consciences. If a state is to engage in war, it needs to convince the people of the sanctity of the war. It is at this level that Ellul thinks the Church's advocacy of non-violence can have an effect on society. Without being able to alter fundamentally the world's violence, the Church, by attacking the consciences of a regime's supporters, can moderate a state's warring tendency.[2] Christianity can influence public opinion, making it difficult for wars to be regarded as "holy".[3] Ellul cites two examples

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example, that Gandhi's efforts would not have been effective had he not been dealing with the British nation, a nation especially influenced by Christianity (Violence, p. 15). "Put Gandhi into the Russia of 1925 or the Germany of 1933. The solution would be simple: after a few days he would be arrested and nothing more would be heard of him" (ibid., p. 15). Ellul thinks that those who advocate non-violence as a policy of world reform fail to recognize that India's case was unique and cannot be repeated throughout history (ibid., p. 15).

1. "It is a great illusion to think that the Church can prevent wars ..." (The Politics of God, p. 35).

2. Violence, p. 144.

3. "Almost always, it is the conviction that 'I am right' or 'my cause is the cause of justice' that triggers violence. That is, the moment a value or an ideal is introduced, the moment motivations for fighting are advanced — in other words, the moment propaganda does its work — violence is unleashed. And violence can be reduced by countering this propaganda [my underline]. For when a man is not quite sure of the virtue of his cause he hesitates to kill. So exposing the reality of violence as an animal reaction, as a 'necessity,' is automatically to reduce the use of violence" (ibid., p. 142). "To induce/...

of the effect that non-violent concern can have on public opinion, which in turn effects political decisions. He points out that it was because of French public opinion that France had to get out of Algeria, even though France had all but won militarily. He also says that public opinion is forcing the United States out of Viet Nam, though the United States could probably have won militarily.[1] The clear implication is that Christians can influence public opinion and public opinion can reduce violence, though not eliminate it. He concludes that "Events of this kind [Algeria and Viet Nam] both prompt and confirm my contention that the refusal of Christians to condone an unjust regime will, in time, work powerfully."[2]

The Biblical Basis

Before we examine the biblical basis of Ellul's opposition to violence, we need to be clear that he does absolutely reject the legitimacy of Christian recourse to violence. He writes, "Violence can

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induce a government ... to see its action as simple brute violence is to induce it to hesitate to use violence" (Violence, p. 143). "I am saying that by demolishing a regime's moral justifications, Christian witness deals it a much severer blow than criminal or guerrilla action can deliver" (ibid., p. 144). "It is only by love that is total, without defense, without reservation, love that does not calculate or bargain, that the white Christian will overcome the evil of revolution, arson, and looting. I make bold to say this even though I am not in the United States; I have lived through similar situations elsewhere" (ibid., p. 174).

1. Ibid., p. 145.

2. Ibid. In his view the Church's witness concerning non-violence would be false were it to become politicized or selective. The Church is to witness continuously to the horror of war and is not to condemn the violence of the West while endorsing Communist violence, or vice versa. Such politicized special pleading is to Ellul sheer hypocrisy. For example, he believes that the Church should have witnessed in opposition to the violence of the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese, as well as in opposition to American violence (ibid., pp. 16-17, 24, 99, 106, 118-119). The witness which the Church owes the world concerning violence has to do with proclaiming God's opposition to all violence.

never be justified or acceptable before God."[1] Without any words of qualification whatsoever he says that "doing violence is evil in God's sight".[2] "Christians can never participate in violence for any reason whatever ..."[3] He is even critical of particular vocations for Christians because they necessarily involve the practice of violence. Of the Christian he writes, "He makes himself ridiculous when he tries to be a politician, a revolutionary, a guerrilla, a policeman,[4] a general."[5]

Ellul (as a biblical Christian) could not be as firmly opposed to Christian participation in violence as he is if he did not have biblical reasons for feeling the way he does. It is thus surprising that at one place he seems to say that the Christian position on violence cannot be based on Scripture, but must be based on sociological realism concerning the nature of violence.[6] It is true that his

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1. Violence, p. 138.

2. Ibid., p. 140.

3. Ibid., p. 158. He says that if a Christian under any circumstances resorts to violence he should recognize that he is not behaving in a Christian way (ibid., p. 137). "Violence is radically incompatible with faith in Jesus Christ" (ibid., p. 159). "The Christian ... may never use violence ..." (ibid., p. 135). "We cannot participate in violence ..." (ibid., p. 157).

4. Ellul rejects the possibility of Christian police work because he refuses to justify any form of violence in the name of the noble purposes sought. He defines violence in an autonomous way, insisting on the sameness of all violence (ibid., pp. 84, 97-99, 130). He does not reject the necessity of police forces or armies; he does seem to believe that Christians should not be involved in these.

5. Ibid., p. 169.

6. "If we want to find out what the Christian attitude toward violence should be, we cannot proceed by deducing the consequences of Christian principles or by enumerating biblical texts. The Bible does frequently condemn violence, but it defends violence just as frequently — even in the New Testament. So this is not a good method of seeking an answer to our question. I believe that the first thing the Christian must do in relation to problems of social ethics is to be completely realistic, to get as clear and exact an understanding of the facts as possible" (ibid., p. 81).

pessimistic assessment of the nature and consequences of violence discourages the practice of violence, since the only sure results of violence are the creation of the habit of violence and the provocation of counter-violence. Still, it seems to us that in fact he does base his position on normative biblical considerations. When he says that the Christian position toward violence cannot be based on Scripture, perhaps what he means is that Scripture offers no consistent doctrine at this point. Though Scripture does not offer a consistent doctrine concerning violence, Ellul does believe that he hears the Word of God speaking through certain aspects of biblical tradition, and he becomes a witness for that aspect of biblical tradition which has claimed his allegiance. In the light of his complete acceptance of certain aspects of biblical tradition, which witness to the importance of non-violence, there is no debating the fact that in actual practice he does use the Bible to establish his normative position. The only question is the way in which he does so. It seems to us that he does so in a Barthian way, by listening for the living Word of God in the various and sometimes conflicting words of the Bible. Though he recognizes the multiplicity of biblical and post-biblical Christian opinion on war, he proceeds to select and to defend one aspect of biblical tradition. His decision is made not without a careful analysis of the horrors of modern war, the knowledge of the impossibility of moral control over modern war, and an understanding of the tragic consequences of violence. Yet he does not base his decision merely on sociological analysis, nor does he, in the final analysis, appeal to sociological analysis as the ultimate basis of his decision; otherwise he would commend non-violence to non-believers and regard sociological reasoning as itself a convincing basis for his position. (Thus he would not need to appeal to Scripture the way he does.)

After having said that violence is always and in all circumstances evil, Ellul affirms that non-violence is most definitely an aspect of the Christian faith. Non-violence is assumed to be a part of Christianity which "must be accepted in its revealed totality --- accepted absolutely intransigently, without cultural or philosophical or any other kind of accommodation or adaptation."[1] He goes on to state the exegetical basis of his opposition to Christian participation in violence.[2] Though he tells us that "Thou shalt not kill" is not to be understood as a law, but as a principle guiding our thought,[3] he himself takes these words very seriously. He interprets these four words of Scripture in the context of Jesus' intensified understanding of the Old Testament prohibition against killing:-

> It is when man is guided by these four words that man is man. ... What differentiates man radically from all other animals is this "Thou shalt not kill". ... All demands implied in these words --- faith in Jesus Christ, love of enemy, the overcoming of evil by love --- must be affirmed, taught and lived with the most absolute intransigence.[4]

He refers to Jesus' own non-violent example as a model for the Christian

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1. Violence, p. 145. "The effectualness of this approach depends on what I shall call Christian radicalism. That is, if the Christian is to contend against violence (whatever its source), he will have to be absolutely intransigent, he will have to refuse to be conciliated. The Christian faith implies rejection and condemnation of both revolutionary violence and the violence of the established powers" (ibid., p. 145).

2. From the passages Ellul refers to one can see that one aspect of the hermeneutical issue here is the acceptance of New Testament tradition in opposition to much Old Testament tradition. Though the New Testament may not consistently oppose violence, it certainly does so to a far greater extent than the Old Testament. Thus, Ellul's passages in defence of non-violence are filled with explicitly New Testament meaning, even the words taken directly from the Old Testament.

3. Ibid., pp. 145-6.

4. Ibid., p. 146. "The whole meaning of the violence of love is contained in Paul's word that evil is to be overcome with good (Rom. 12:17-21). This is a generalization of the Sermon on the Mount" (ibid., p. 172).

life. He appeals to Oscar Cullmann[1] as having conclusively proved that Jesus did not advocate violence.[2] Ellul writes:-

> To use violence is to be of the world. Every time the disciples wanted to use any kind of violence they came up against Christ's veto (the episode of the fire pouring from heaven on the cities that rejected Christ, the parable of the tares and the wheat, Peter's sword, etc.).[3]
>
> Jesus carried the commandment "Thou shalt not kill" to the extreme limit, and in his person manifested non-violence and even non-resistance to evil. When he was arrested, he neither allowed Peter to defend him nor called the "twelve legions of angels" to his aid.[4]

The Refusal to Use Christianity to Justify Violence

Ellul is even more opposed to using Christianity to justify violence than he is opposed to Christian participation in violence. Though he consistently sees violence as a sin in the eyes of God, he does recognize that Christians for human reasons sometimes may find themselves participating in violence. If the Christian finds himself in such a position (as Ellul did in World War II), he should never seek to give a Christian justification for his conduct.[5] Rather, he must confess that he is involved in sin and pray for forgiveness, knowing that violent conduct cannot witness to a Kingdom of love.[6]

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1. Dieu et César (Neuchâtel and Paris: Delauchaux and Niestlé, 1956).
2. Violence, p. 47.
3. Ibid., pp. 129-130; see also p. 18.
4. Ibid., p. 9.
5. "We must reject all attempts to justify violence on Christian grounds. ... Violence as such, on the animal level, is the direct expression of our nature as animals; it certainly shows that we live in a state of sin — but that is nothing new. But any attempt to justify violence (by emotional considerations, by a doctrine, a theology, etc.) is a supplementary perversion of fallen nature at the hands of man. ... Thus we as Christians are obliged on the one hand to attack all justifications for the use of violence, and on the other to refuse to provide Christian justifications" (ibid., p. 140; see also p. 74).
6. Ibid., p. 137; The Politics of God, pp. 37-38; "Correspondence," p. 211. "If a Christian feels that he must participate in a violent movement (or in a war!) let him do so discerningly. He ought to be the one who, even as he acts with the others, proclaims the injustice and the unacceptability of what he and they are doing" (Violence, p. 141). "Violence can never be justified or acceptable before God. The Christian/...

Though Ellul may appear to be a legalist on the issue of violence, he does not intend to be so and says several things which qualify a legalistic interpretation. He never identifies his position with that of "pacifism", for the reason that he thinks that pacifists focus so one-sidedly on the issue of non-violence that they forget that peace has no meaning in isolation from the Prince of peace, Jesus Christ. Because Ellul's theology is so Christocentric, he is not willing to let specific moral issues become the either-or issues of faith.[1] To see the whole of Christianity as determined by such issues as speaking in tongues, adult baptism, or non-violence is to him sectarianism.[2] Sometimes (as above) Ellul seems to regard non-violence as itself an aspect of the kerygma, rather than as an implication flowing from the kerygma (which is subject to debate). Yet he can also give an historical assessment of the Church which shows that genuine Christians historically have taken differing positions on the issue of war.[3] Along

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Christian can only admit humbly that he could not do otherwise, that he took the easy way and yielded to necessity and the pressures of the world. That is why the Christian, even when he permits himself to use violence in what he considers the best of causes, cannot either feel or say that he is justified; he can only confess that he is a sinner, submit to God's judgment, and hope for God's grace and forgiveness" (Violence, p. 138).

In a letter to this writer dated Sept.14, 1972, Ellul agreed that there had been a translation mistake made in a letter from him published in Christianity and Crisis ("Correspondence," p. 221). As published, it appears that he believes that violent conduct can witness to the love of God and the nearness of the Kingdom. Quite to the contrary, he says that he believes that violent conduct, though sometimes humanly necessary, is an inappropriate means of witnessing to Christ. Of course, God in His sovereignty can accomplish His purposes even in and through the world's violence, and thus can use violence to effect His purpose of love. To Ellul this fact is not to be confused either with the notion that violence can conform to God's intentional will or with the idea that violence witnesses to God's love.

1. The Politics of God, p. 138.
2. False Presence, p. 99.
3. Violence, pp. 1-26.

similar lines, he can refer to General Naaman who, as a man of war, was not excluded from God's love (which in the context means God's covenant fellowship).[1] It is very difficult to resolve these two sides of Ellul's thought. Perhaps what he is really doing is stating what he regards as the Christian ideal (the non-violent pursuance of peace), while recognizing that because of the tragic sinfulness of the world, Christians sometimes find that they are caught up in the world's sin. Even if Christians are involved in violence, they should know that God's love is not withdrawn. His thought here may relate to his view (discussed earlier in our dissertation) that compromise is not to be glorified by being charted in advance. Though "'evil may eventually creep in'", it is not to be tolerated or justified. "Killing is killing and ... there is no way to resign oneself to it."[2] Though in some situations violence even to the Christian may seem humanly defensible and necessary, he is not to use his faith to justify his violence.[3]

Strictly speaking Ellul does not offer even a human defence of violence. What he does say is that while he believes violence to be contrary to Christianity and hence to be avoided by Christians, he understands and sympathizes with those non-believers who under certain circumstances resort to violence. He is not offering a "just war" theory, since he regards all war as unjust. He differs from the just war theologians in rejecting Christian participation in violence and by absolutely refusing to use Christianity to justify violence — under any circumstances. Nevertheless, he does recognize that the world's violence is under certain circumstances understandable. He

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1. The Politics of God, p. 25.
2. A Critique, p. 45.
3. See above, p. 86, n. 2.

writes:-

> I fully understand the insurrection of the oppressed who see no way out, who fight desperately against the violence done them and will break loose from their chains the moment they can. I fully understand the revolt of the slaves, the violent workers' strikes of the nineteenth century, the rebellion of colonized peoples who want to avenge a century of humiliation, privation and injustice at one blow! I understand these explosions, and, what is more, I approve of them. The oppressed have no other way of protesting their human right to live; and they think, too, that by rebelling they can change their situation for the better, if only in some small degree. But what cannot be condoned is that Christians associate themselves with this avengement, and, worse, that Christians affirm that violence will secure fundamental change.[1] . . . .
>
> Thus — speaking as a Christian — I say that while I cannot call violence good, legitimate, and just, I find its use condonable (1) when a man is in despair and sees no other way out, or (2) when a hypocritically just and peaceful situation must be exposed for what it is in order to end it. But I must emphasize that in these cases, too, violence is of the 'order of necessity' therefore contradictory to the Christian life, whose root is freedom. Moreover, I must emphasize that this understandable, acceptable, condonable violence may change quickly. Opposing an unjust order, creating a state of disorder out of which (depending on how fluid the situation is) renewal may issue — this is acceptable, providing that the users of violence do not pretend that they are creating order; what they are creating is one more injustice.[2]

While sympathizing with spontaneous violence, Ellul has no sympathy with those revolutionaries who make violence a factor of strategy.[3] One might wonder why Ellul draws the line in this way, seeming to give preferential treatment to spontaneous acts of violence as contrasted with acts thought out ahead of time. The fact of the matter is that he is not giving preferential treatment to any kind of violence, since he regards it all as wrong. What he is saying is that he understands those who have been so deprived that they are no longer able to restrain their violence — and hence they turn to revolution. However, those

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1. Violence, pp. 68-9.
2. Ibid., p. 133.
3. "We must sympathize with the man whose suffering explodes in violence, but we must refuse to countenance the one who considers violence a tool, a strategical tactic he is free to use at will" (ibid., p. 134).

who use revolution as a tool lead others astray, promising great things which revolution as such can never accomplish and which revolution is seldom even instrumental in attaining.

Since Ellul is unwilling to use Christianity to justify violence of any sort, it comes as no surprise that he criticizes "just war" theories.[1] In addition to the criticism of the ultima ratio type of just war theory, he has two basic criticisms of these theories. First, he thinks that just war reasoning has traditionally assumed that men can retain moral control over the conduct of war.[2] He believes that in modern warfare there are no moral controls. To conduct modern warfare in a moral way means to lose wars --- a cost no nation will accept.[3] For example, in torturing prisoners to get information, all methods will be used that are necessary to get the needed information.[4] "The rules of war really are valid only when there is no war. For the sole rule of war is to win."[5] Ellul believes that the traditional conditions which were assumed as the basis of just war reasoning were

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1. See above, pp. 295-9, for Ellul's criticisms of a particular type of just war theory (ultima ratio). There his point was that to wait to wage war until all peaceful alternatives have been exhausted may lead to greater violence in the end.

2. Violence, p. 5.

3. "The nature of violence is such that it has no limits. We have seen that it is impossible to set up laws of warfare. Either no war happens to be going on, and then it is easy to make agreements as to the limitations that should be established; or else a war is under way, and then all agreements fall before the imperative of victory" (ibid., pp. 98-99).
   Ellul's whole discussion of violence reads like the personal confession of a man who has seen the horrors of modern war and has concluded that the horrible reality of war invalidates it as a strategy Christians should defend (ibid., p. 29). He writes that "violence means bloodshed ... human beings screaming in pain and fear" (ibid., p. 116). This, I take it, is the reality of violence as Ellul came to know it as a participant in the French Resistance.

4. Ibid., p. 98.

5. The Political Illusion, p. 77.

formulated in a day when there was a relative clarity about the war situation. He says that the phenomenon of modern war and the extent of the battlefields rule out the application of these criteria and make them inoperable.[1] Secondly, just war theories assume that the end sanctifies the means, "that violence is good or bad depending on the use or purpose to which it is dedicated."[2] Ellul, to the contrary, argues that there are not two kinds of violence, but all violence is wrong — regardless of the goals to which it is dedicated.[3] "On the moral scale, violence exercised against a single human being is an absolute weight, whatever the form, the result or the cause of that violence."[4]

Critical Issues

Ellul is not unaware of the obvious criticism that can be levied against his and all other non-violent positions. The accusation is that if one is not willing to resort to violence to help the oppressed, one is encouraging and condoning the violence of oppressors.[5] The person who is consistently non-violent is said to be unloving toward the victims of violence. The fact that Ellul recognizes this problem and admits that even those who advocate non-violence are not free from

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1. Violence, p. 6.
2. Ibid., p. 6.
3. Ibid., p. 113.
4. Ibid., p. 112. While agreeing that for Christians the end does not justify the means, we have already argued that police action can be defended on the basis of Rom. 13. Though the Christian may not himself engage in violence, he is aware that when it comes to society some ends do justify some means. Concerning modern warfare, we agree with Ellul that it is hard to see how Christianity can justify war. Though some people might appeal to Rom. 13 in defence of war, we think that the nature of war is such as to invalidate any effort to give it a Christian justification.
5. Ibid., p. 136.

guilt, sets his position off from the self-righteousness associated with "pacifism".[1] However, in spite of the fact that the advocacy of non-violence involves guilt, he feels that non-violence more appropriately witnesses to Jesus Christ. (After all, the charge that can be levied against the advocates of non-violence can also be raised in criticism of Jesus' own conduct.) Those who criticize concerning the guilt involved in non-violence need to be reminded that there is also great guilt connected with violence! We also must remember that Ellul has spoken of a Christian alternative service. Though the Christian cannot resort to violence, he is to stand in active identification with the oppressed.[2]

A deeper problem in Ellul's thought is that it may not be so easy to separate the verbal defence of violence from the act of pulling the trigger. Because Ellul is such a social and political realist, he is not at all a pacifist when it comes to his opinion about the state's use of violence. As a member of a democratic society, his political opinions would in some cases tend to support the state's war efforts, though as a Christian he himself could participate in violence only as an act of disobedience. The duality here goes back to the basic duality he establishes between the Church and the world, the clash he envisions between Christian perfectionism and social and political realism. The problem is that the verbal defence of the state's violence may be as instrumental in the accomplishment of violent acts as the direct act of killing. In giving verbal support for the

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1. Violence, p. 138; see above, p. 196, n. 3.

2. "I hold that in every situation of injustice and oppression, the Christian — who cannot deal with it by violence — must make himself completely a part of it as representative of the victims" (ibid., pp. 151-2; see above, pp. 327-328).

state's violence the Christian himself may thus be engaged in violence. Ellul does not seem to deal with this charge, but one suspects that he would be willing to admit the guilt involved. He would certainly not be willing to back down from his social and political realism, since he thinks that in a world of sin the direct application of Christian ideals to politics is disastrous.[1]

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1. Even if Christians could agree that all killing is wrong, this would not in many cases tell them which political alternatives to support, because in many situations all political alternatives involve violence. If other nations are preparing for war against one's own country, the counsel of patience may eventually lead to more deaths than would a quick declaration of war. Either choice involves violence. As tragic as it is, there just does not seem to be a Christian alternative for a non-Christian society.
   Assuming that all Christians regarded abortions as wrong (except in the case of a threat to the mother's life) this would not establish a Christian political decision on the issue. Those Christians who opposed all legislation favouring abortion would have the death of thousands of women on their hands. (In the absence of abortion laws, we know that thousands of women die because they seek illegal abortions from unqualified people). On the other hand, those Christians who favour legal abortion have the deaths of thousands of unborn infants as the guilt they must bear for their political decision. On such political issues, which do not offer Christian alternatives, one can only balance the factors and make what seems to be the best decision possible. No decision will represent the Christian truth, since the Christian truth cannot be directly applied to a non-Christian society.

CHAPTER X

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

Ellul the Prophetic Christian Witness

It is obvious from the preceding pages that Jacques Ellul is a very difficult man to pin down. Studying him is like studying a bird in flight, or a bird who occasionally touches down only to take off again. By the time the interpreter thinks that he has understood him at one point, he has already flown elsewhere and is fighting on a different battle-line from the one which had just become familiar. The interpreter is always chasing after him and having the haunting feeling that he has never really gotten hold of him. It is impossible to predict what he is going to say next, in the next book or article, on the next page, or in the next sentence! Even when the interpreter seizes Ellul at his latest resting place, he has great difficulties relating what he hears him saying to what he thinks he has heard previously. And so the interpreter's dilemma goes on and on!

There is a prophetic imprecision about Ellul's style of writing which must in the final analysis be a part of the man himself, or better, God's use of this passionate servant. Chronological development explains very little. True, he has become more of a social pessimist with every tick of the clock, but such chronological development accounts for only a small proportion of the seeming contradictions we have faced in the foregoing pages. To put the matter bluntly: Ellul has been wildly paradoxical in his formulations from the very first, and often even within the same book contradictions can be found. The fact that contradictions occur in different parts of the same book also moderates

the thesis that the polemical context of his writings explains his one-sided way of putting points. This theory is not to be discounted entirely, since he always does seem to have a theological idea or opponent in view, and always sets his position over against something else (usually something very popular). It still seems to be true that though for individual books the sparring partner or partners remain the same, contradictory formulations are nevertheless present. In the final analysis the only satisfactory explanation for Ellul's writing style is Ellul himself. Here we encounter a modern Johannine man, who thinks in sharp contrasts, and leaves it for his interpreters to sort out the relationships between the various polarities he has thrown up for consideration. Just as the Old Testament prophet did not sit down and write a systematic interpretation of his own utterances, but instead continued to speak the one-sided Word as he felt called by God to do, so Ellul does not do the interpreter's job for him. He does not attempt to give a systematic interpretation of his own thought.

Are we perhaps doing Ellul an injustice in seeking systematic coherence, rather than being content with what at many places borders on prophetic incoherence? In spite of the fact that we have done something different with Ellul's thought from what he himself has done, we do not believe that he would oppose our effort (though he may not agree with all of our interpretations). Though he thinks in sharp contrasts and has the writing habit of making overstatements, we do not think that he intends for either his way of writing or his thinking to be destructive of the Church's effort to find theological truth. Theological truth is very important and precious to him.

Methodological Remarks

Our conclusion will consist mainly of a summary of the interpretative

conclusions we have reached in the previous chapters.[1] (In the final section we will mention some more general conclusions related to the way Ellul does Christian ethics.) In these interpretative conclusions we will deal with only four types of material. First, we will attempt to state what we regard as the main lines of Ellul's Christian ethic. A great deal of discretion will be called for here, since space is limited and since the basic subject matter of his ethic is very broad. In all cases more complete statements can be found in the individual chapters in question. Secondly, we will state some of the negative criticisms that we have of the main thrust of his ethic. (We are not attempting to state all such criticisms.) Even concerning these major criticisms, we will not repeat all of the details involved (which again can be located in the chapters in question). Thirdly, we will mention the major contradictions which still seem to stand with reference to the essential content of his ethic. Fourthly, we will occasionally refer to the arguments which were involved in evaluations which led to agreement at particular points. (At all points we have sought to be evaluatory.) Frequently we will not state such arguments, since they have often involved detailed exegetical considerations which would be tedious to summarize in conclusion. At those points where we offer neither negative criticism nor positive evaluation, it is assumed that we agree with Ellul, but that we are not taking the space to discuss the basis of our agreement (which can be located in preceding chapters).

Our conclusion represents a radical methodological shift from what

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1. Though we will state our conclusions by going chapter by chapter, we will not adhere to this method with absolute rigidity. For the sake of brevity and synthesis, we will sometimes allow insights from chapters other than those in question to appear. Likewise, when attempting to summarize our conclusions from particular chapters, every effort will be made to allow the material to interpenetrate. Whereas in our analysis we needed to break the material into many separate units for the purpose of detailed analysis and documentation, here every effort will be made to synthesize the various conclusions reached.

preceded, but we believe that this shift is justified by the subject matter, as we believe that the previous methods are justified by the same. Previously we were seeking to establish our interpretation of Ellul's ethic; consequently, our method was to a large extent analytical. Specifically, we had to analyze numerous seemingly contradictory statements to discover whether the contradictions were real or only apparent and whether they were major or peripheral. The decisions we reached on such questions directly informed the various interpretations made. All of the evidence of which we are aware has now been discussed and our interpretations and evaluations have been stated. However, because analysis and interpretative conclusions are woven together in the preceding chapters, it is not easy to locate the conclusions. It is our purpose here to isolate our interpretative conclusions from the previous detailed argumentation, that the broad shape of Ellul's ethic may be seen at a single glance. It is hoped that our conclusion will help us to guard against the danger of losing sight of the essential points. Of course, our conclusion cannot stand on its own, for it proves nothing; it only summarizes in a systematic way the main conclusions previously reached.[1]

Because of the nature and purpose of our conclusion, there are many categories of material previously dealt with which will not be summarized here (though all of these considerations have directly informed the conclusions reached). First, there will be no discussion of minor contradictions which we believe are peripheral to Ellul's thought. Though honesty required that we recognize these in the body of our work, discretion demands that we omit them here. As things actually have worked out, most of our criticisms have been of this

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1. We do not believe that our conclusion should attempt to prove the correctness of our analysis and interpretation. We do not think that the conclusion should attempt to accomplish what only the dissertation itself can accomplish.

peripheral side of his thought.[1] Though not uncritical of even the main thrust of his thinking, we are much more sympathetic towards that than towards his various peripheral formulations, which often seemed to us quite untenable. Because so many of our criticisms have been of the periphery of his thought, our conclusion will be much more constructive than was much of the preceding analysis.

Secondly, contradictory formulations which we argued were best interpreted by de-literalization will not be considered directly, since in their de-literalized form they actually support the major points.[2]

Thirdly, our conclusion will not deal with theological parallels. The consideration of such parallels has been a major part of our work. Ellul is a lay theologian who sometimes states points without fully developing them. Because this is the case, we have paid a great deal of attention to his theological teachers, in order more fully to understand his intention. At specific points, we have been able to trace out more fully ideas found in rudimentary form in Ellul's own writings. Since the purpose of studying theological parallels was to understand Ellul's thought better, we will not here discuss parallels as such, but will summarize what we believe is the essential content of Ellul's ethical thought, which these parallels have helped us to understand.

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1. At many points the choice we faced was not that of choosing for or against Ellul, but for one aspect of his thought in opposition to another. However, we have tried not to use our own evaluatory position as a norm for deciding what was or was not central to his thinking, but have tried to let the evidence speak for itself, even when that meant that we had to disagree at major points.

2. Our interpretative labours have involved the effort to distinguish between major contradictions which distort the main line of Ellul's thought, minor peripheral contradictions, and seeming contradictions which can legitimately be de-literalized. Since there have been so many seemingly contradictory statements, we absolutely do not claim finality to our interpretation. At each point of our analysis the evidence must be weighed and the adequacy of our interpretation evaluated. It is easy to see how the recognition of a differing emphasis might in some cases tip the balance and call for a re-alignment of these three categories.

Fourthly, our conclusion will not involve a major effort to summarize the various strategy proposals which Ellul has made, though we will occasionally mention some. Nor will we attempt to state our evaluations of such proposals. We are mainly concerned to summarize the general theological principles underlying such suggestions, rather than to repeat the proposals themselves.

Interpretative Conclusions from Previous Chapters

Chapter I. The Human Condition: Bondage

Ellul believes that the natural human condition is marked by the absence of freedom and a bondage to various determinants. One way he describes the human situation is in terms of a radical bondage to sin, which he sees as man's natural state of existence. With good Johannine and Pauline justification, he describes sin as autonomy or separation from God, the failure to live in and from God. Sin is thus not defined in terms of external moral acts, but in terms of the sphere of influence in which a person lives. Sin is man's separation from the Source of true life, a state of being which affects all men at the very centre of their existence. For the natural man, the man who trusts in his own strength and self-reliance and fails to live in and from the Spirit of God, even morally good deeds are the expression of sin, the expression of autonomy and separation from God. (God does not claim merely man's outward life, but also his inward being.)

In Ellul's understanding, the moral consequences of separation from God are immense, widespread, and disastrous. He is very pessimistic about the moral goodness of natural man and thus warns Christians against naively thinking that they can automatically agree with the ways of the world. (A major emphasis of his writings is to warn the Church against the ever popular tendency of conforming to the world.) Nevertheless, because he defines sin as a religious category, he does not deny that

some non-Christian deeds may on particular occasions be objectively in agreement with God's intention (this because of God's providential guidance, not because of natural man's inherent goodness or because of a natural relationship to God). Though all non-Christian acts are the expression of autonomy, they are not all for that reason objectively contrary to God's intention. Though man's fall from God is complete and total in terms of his covenant relationship with God, it is not total and complete in the moral sphere (though neither is the moral effect modest). This being Ellul's general understanding (some contradictory formulations being present), he can advise Christians that sometimes they can in good conscience agree with non-believers at the level of concrete activity. The Church is required only to aim at absolute faithfulness to God, not at absolute distinctiveness. (This point can be given Pauline support.) Because he sees the moral consequences of the fall as severe, he warns Christians that the only way in which this area of overlap can be determined is by the Christian effort to agree only at those points where non-believers for their own various reasons happen to agree with conduct which Christians judge by their own norms to be faithful to God's will. It is the Christians' task first of all to perceive God's will; only then can the area of overlap be determined. Agreement or disagreement with the world can only be the concrete event in which Christians find that in obedience to Christ they can agree at particular points or that they must disagree.

Ellul's understanding of man's bondage to sin comes to expression in his statements concerning human morality. Human morality is natural morality and thus is the expression of man's autonomy and separation from God. Human morality is of the order of the fall. It is also of the order of necessity. It is necessary in the sense that in a fallen world which must operate on the basis of non-Christian assumptions, human morality is imperative for the sake of order and stability.

Because the world cannot base its life on the Spirit morality of the Church, there is a basic duality between the morality of the world and the Christian ethic. In the two cases the moral dynamic is entirely different. One is based on autonomy; the other is based on a covenant relationship with God. Human morality is also of the order of necessity because it is the expression of biological, sociological and psychological necessities, rather than an example of human transcendence. Because Christians recognize that non-Christians cannot base their lives on the demands of a Christ in whom they do not believe, Christians themselves are not to despise the world's morality, even though that morality is based merely on various human necessities.

Not only does Ellul speak of human bondage to sin, but he also refers to a supra-individual force of evil in the world. As a student of the New Testament, he knows that it talks about a fallen world and of the activity of a demonic force inimical to God's purposes. As a modern sociologist, he sees supra-personal social forces moulding and influencing human life, even when such influences are not recognized. His theological and sociological thinking interpenetrate at this point. He translates his biblical point of view into sociological thought forms. In a general way he accepts the New Testament category of the demonic, but instead of referring to the first-century world view in which this understanding was originally expressed, he finds modern analogies from within his sociological study: he sees the detrimental influence of institutions on men.

Since Ellul sees human bondage as a bondage to sin, he cannot be justly accused of being a mere environmentalist. For him, the human problem is not merely external to man, but is at the very centre of every human life. However, he believes that the world effectively proclaims and helps to propagate an autonomous self-understanding and also works

to influence men to commit particular sins. The world encourages man's alienation from God and it is impossible to draw a clear dividing line between the detrimental influence of the world on man and man's natural autonomy. There is an interaction of the sinful world on man and man on the sinful world. Though there is circularity involved here, there is no inconsistency in believing in a covenant definition of sin and yet also believing that society helps to transmit this false understanding.

We think that Ellul's thought is defensible at this point. Perhaps he could have been more frank about the extent to which he is offering a somewhat demythologized version of the New Testament category of the demonic. Still, we think that a position which recognizes the supra-individual power of evil is more akin to the New Testament view than one which simply identifies the human problem with individual sin.

In relating human sin to a corporate power of evil, Ellul has, in effect, given us a modern restatement of the traditional doctrine of original sin. He believes that prior to any conscious will to sin, man is already in bondage to a false understanding of life. Living in a technological society, one is already influenced by a materialistic way of life. Living in a society preoccupied with work, one already has a distorted view of what truly constitutes vocation. Living in a society where political affairs are often regarded as the sole ingredients of history, one already is to some extent politicized in one's thinking. A part of the meaning of becoming a Christian is thus to receive a degree of freedom from such determinants.

Ellul has extended the Reformation and Neo-Reformation understanding of the bondage of the will to include a bondage to social determinants. Though we agree with the value and relevance of this insight, we think that at some places he overstates himself by saying that sin implies <u>total</u> bondage to these determinants. We think that here his own

sociological pessimism and cynicism have led to conclusions which are not justified by either the biblical or the empirical evidence. For example, at some places he says that bondage to sin implies total bondage to sociological patterns of conformity, as though non-believers can do no acts which might manifest even a small degree of freedom from the moulding influences of their environment. (At other places he seems to qualify this statement; hence, our criticism is but a criticism of one side of his thinking.) Since sin leads to moral disruption, we believe that it is defensible to say that separation from God severely lessens the possibility of transcending social conditioning. We think, however, that neither exegetical nor sociological proof can be found to substantiate a claim that this conformity to one's social milieu is total.

Another example of a case where Ellul's sociological cynicism gets the better of him is in his analysis of the city. He points to the city as a specific example of the way in which man is influenced by social determinants. We agree with the basic point, but disagree that either biblically or sociologically the city can be shown to be as monstrous as he imagines. Certainly the city influences man both in terms of sin and sins. Just as the world in general proclaims an autonomous way of life, so the secular city does the same. At particular points the city may indeed be guilty of contributing to particular sins, materialism especially. We disagree, however, with the way in which Ellul cynically singles out the city for blame, both in terms of sin and sins. If sin is a category common to all men, if all men are separated from God, we fail to see how sin can be a unique function of the city. Likewise, though the sins of the city may be worse than those of the country, we think that the balance is not as decisively against the city as he thinks. For example, we disagree that war is a phenomenon possible only in a city culture. This historical assertion seems to us simply to be false. He

mentions some of the contributions of the city, but fails to take them into account when he pronounces his judgment of condemnation. Of course, we are not trying to baptize the city, as, for example, Harvey Cox has done. We simply think that more fairness is called for. If the sins of the city are to be compared with the sins of the country, this ought to be a matter for fair debate, drawing on empirical observation.

Beneath our criticism of Ellul's scathing critique of the city is a conviction that the scriptural methods of interpretation used to establish his critique are themselves dubious. We are suspicious of his inferential method of isolating references to the city from contexts not having to do directly with the city. He deduces a unified doctrine of the city from the Bible only by isolating and then synthesizing references to the city which occur in historical contexts not directly implying judgment on the city — but judgment on Israel or on man generally. We think that the Bible does not offer an ontology of the city. Ellul's eisegetical methods used to deduce such a doctrine are themselves evidence against the very point he is trying to make. If the only way such a doctrine can be found is by such interpretative methods, one is suspicious that no such doctrine actually exists <u>in the Bible</u>. Far from using the Bible to establish a doctrine of the city, we think that Ellul's labours only show how easy it is to read modern viewpoints back into Scripture (in this case modern sociological viewpoints).

<u>Chapter II.</u> <u>Freedom as Christocentric Existence</u>

Ellul understands true freedom as based on existence in and from Christ. Though natural man is in bondage to sin and affected by various social determinants, Christ is the Deliverer who is adequate to meet the human dilemma. Just as Jesus Christ was the true man, who found freedom

through obedience to God, so Christian freedom is freedom for God, which comes through the receipt of grace. The words freedom, grace, and obedience are words which have meaning only in relationship to one another.

Ellul believes that the receipt of grace leads to freedom from bondage to sociological patterns of conformity. Christ is the Saviour who grants freedom with respect to such things as materialism, professionalism or preoccupation with work and status, ideological bondage and obsession with politics, public opinion, current events, the sacredness of technology, etc.

We believe that there is plenty of biblical support for Ellul's theocentric understanding of freedom. Though modern men tend to think of freedom as the right to do whatever one wants, the New Testament regards that kind of freedom as a virtual slavery to sin. By defining freedom as he has, Ellul has overcome the hiatus between freedom and authority, without encouraging human tyranny. (Freedom is slavery to God, not to other human beings.)

In Ellul's understanding, the Christian good has to do with continually coming within the sphere of influence of the Risen Lord. The Christian good has to do with the continuing receipt of grace, whereby a man's life becomes responsive to God's purposes. Since the Christian good has to do with living in daily openness to the impact of God, prayer is seen as the crucial means of grace from which the Christian ethical life is nourished.

Ellul stresses the priority of Christian being, while recognizing that being must express itself in Christian doing. He is insistent that the only doing which is pleasing to God is that which is the fruit of faith. He believes that in a world preoccupied with activity, a Christian emphasis on the priority of being comes as a revolutionary Word.

His emphasis on the covenant basis of the Christian life reminds the Church of the importance of her own spiritual and reflective life. His stress on the priority of being, but the necessity of doing, helps to bridge the gap between evangelical and liberal Christians. With the evangelicals he opposes a humanism which denies the primacy of man's relationship to God. When Christian activists underemphasize the importance of prayer and Christian reflection, their activity becomes superficial and the conformist expression of purely human viewpoints. With Christian liberals or activists he believes in the importance of loving service to the neighbour. It is no less heretical to focus one-sidedly on man's relationship with God (orthodox quietism) than it is to think that one can serve one's neighbour in a Christian way without continual renewal through worship and Christian education.

Chapter III. Freedom as Eschatological Existence

Ellul's Christian ethic is very much in the tradition of the New Testament emphasis on the eschatological nature of Christian life. The receipt of grace is seen as taking the form of deliverance from bondage to the ways of the present evil age. Such deliverance is seen as possible because both inwardly and outwardly Christians are enabled to live in faithfulness to the coming Kingdom. Though such an emphasis runs directly counter to secular theology's stress on the similarity between Christians and men in general, we think that the New Testament does recognize the otherness of the Christian life, just as it recognizes the transcendent otherness of the Christian God. We agree with Ellul that it is hard to see what the Church's being sent into the world can mean, if she is indistinguishable from the world and has nothing to offer the world which the world cannot offer itself. Likewise, we agree that it is superficial to talk of laymen offering a Christian witness in the world,

unless more effort goes into theological and spiritual training for this mission.

We think that Ellul's sanctification theology is all the stronger because it avoids the sectarian pitfall of failing to see the importance of justification. He cannot be justly accused of advocating a Christian self-righteousness, because he is aware that converted Christians continue to remain sinners desperately in need of divine forgiveness and renewal. Because even Christians are radically sinful, they must continually struggle in opposition to their own sin and in opposition to their bondage to the sinful ways of the world. Christians must daily receive the power of God and His forgiveness, that they may continue the agonizing effort to become obedient. Christian obedience is not easy or automatic. The Christian life involves a dynamic movement in which Christians must continually move from bondage to sin to freedom through grace. The paradoxical nature of the Christian life cannot be understood by those who stress only forgiveness or only holiness. Though Christians know the power of the new age, they are still very much subject to the influence of the old age and thus must daily repent of their sinfulness.

In keeping with the otherness of the Christian life, Ellul advocates what we have labelled "perfectionism". He believes that Christians must strive to have the means which they use be the consistent reflection of the Gospel in which they believe. "What is in the service of Jesus Christ receives its character and effectiveness from Jesus Christ."[1] Christians are called to manifest the coming Kingdom in their own persons and thus to fulfil a unique function. Unchristian methods distract from the Christian's purpose, because that purpose has to do with embodying a quality of faithfulness which witnesses to the

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1. Propaganda, p. 231.

Gospel. The basis of Ellul's reasoning is Christological. He believes that in Jesus Christ the means utilized was the realized presence of the end sought. To reveal a Kingdom of love, Jesus Christ manifested in His own person a manner of life consistent with that Kingdom. Those who live in Christ are called to share in this reunification of means and ends, which is possible through eschatological existence.

Perhaps one of the most inspiring features of Ellul's ethic is his stress on the importance of not compromising for the sake of getting ahead, his insistence that we should not sacrifice obedience today for the sake of some more effective opportunity tomorrow. He inspires Christians to get on with the business of living the Christian life here and now, and living it in the strenuous effort to be truly faithful to God. He helps Christians to stop worrying about being influential or famous and to start worrying about how their present lives are measuring up to God's radical expectations.

Ellul's discussion of Christian styles of life has to do with his belief concerning the importance of a correspondence between Christian belief and conduct. He thinks that the ability to communicate the Gospel relates directly to the degree to which one is faithful to the Gospel proclaimed. He is not concerned that all Christian lives be outwardly identical. In fact, he utterly denies that such would be an ideal state of affairs. If God is a living God who demands particular forms of obedience from different individuals, the assumption of a common pattern of existence by all Christians would deny the unique and specific response God expects. What Ellul is insisting upon is that both inwardly and <u>outwardly</u> Christian life should manifest allegiance to Christ. What worries him is that Christian behaviour is all too often based on conformity to one's social milieu, rather than being the expression of the Gospel. His acceptance of Barth's "One Kingdom"

reasoning is really but an aspect of the Calvinist (and Christian!) belief that the whole of life is to be lived for the glory of God. When he says that there should be a visibility about the Christian life, he is not saying that at all points the Christian life must be absolutely different from non-Christian life. He is merely insisting that points of agreement or disagreement must be determined by Christians on the basis of what they genuinely believe constitutes obedience to Christ.

In addition to the perfectionism just discussed, another characteristic feature of Ellul's eschatological understanding is that it relates to social realism. In his thought eschatological hope leads to the establishment of a Christian courage to withstand the evils of the world and to represent a higher way. (In his view Christian hope has nothing to do with the view that the world is improving.) Specifically, he believes that through a hope which transcends history, Christians can become free to criticize the commonplace assumptions which form the basis of the modern world. Eschatological hope leads Christians to be discontented with <u>every</u> existing society, because when judged by the transcendent Kingdom revealed in Christ, all human social orders are found wanting.

<u>Chapter IV</u>. <u>The Concreteness of Obedience</u>

What Ellul says about the concreteness of obedience is really the direct expression of what he has learned from Karl Barth. At this point an evaluation of Ellul is a direct evaluation of Barth.

Both men see the Christian good as having to do with God in His living activity as Commander.[1] Though biblical laws and moral

1. Because of their belief in the living God, Barth and Ellul are not willing to understand the Christian ethic as the rational application of rules or principles.

injunctions are seen as vitally important for the perception of God's living command, they are not simply identified with God's will for today. Behind such an understanding are several basic Barthian convictions: the reversal of the traditional Law-Gospel schema, the belief in the freedom of God in the present, the recognition that the Bible is primarily a theological document revealing the nature of God (hence biblical morality is to be received in a more relative way than biblical theology). Another basic assumption is the acceptance of a doctrine of Scripture whereby the Word of God is seen as a living event, rather than as identifiable with the words of the Bible. While agreeing that the Word of God can repeat the message of Scripture, it is also recognized that especially in moral matters God can speak a new Word or can give concrete applications having differing ranges of meaning to different individuals.

The most basic assumption (though not the most explicit one!) is the acceptance of a trinitarian doctrine of God. This belief is really assumed in all the convictions just stated and seems to us to be the basic premise underlying both Barthian theology and ethics. Of course, no belief as such is going to solve the problem of the Christian ethic — which is a matter of daily faithfulness to God. This belief does point to the basic way Christians are to go about the task of attempting to perceive God's will.

The doctrine of the trinity affirms that the same God who has spoken in the past speaks today. At least in Western tradition, the Holy Spirit has been identified with the Spirit of the Risen Lord. At a very minimum the ethical meaning of this identification is that there is a vital connection between God's moral Word in the past and His moral Word today. This connection can be misunderstood in two ways. With the extreme situationalists, one can underemphasize the importance of past revelation; with the legalists, one can fail to recognize the

freedom of the Holy Spirit to speak a concrete and specific Word to man today. The former group virtually ignores biblical law; the latter group codifies biblical law so rigidly that God's present activity is seen as limited to endorsing what He has said in the past.

Barth's and Ellul's approach to ethics transcends the two alternatives just mentioned. Both men insist on the absolute necessity of doing one's biblical and exegetical homework if God's living Word is to be perceived and if ethics is to be anything more than human opinion. Both men also insist that though God commands in ways consistent with His past activity, He is not a boring and monotonous God who is limited to merely repeating what He once said, though He is free to do that very thing. Past revelation is concretized by and in some cases severely relativized by God's present activity. Ethics in a trinitarian style involves openness to change, because the Holy Spirit is alive today. It also involves continuity with the past, because the God who is alive today is the same God who has come to man in Jesus Christ.

From these basic theological convictions certain ethical consequences follow. For one thing, the role of Christian ethics must itself be relativized so as to recognize the freedom of God. A practical casuistry is possible; a casuistry as such is not. A practical casuistry is aware of its own relativity; it does not confuse its own witness with the absolutely authoritative Word which only God can speak. A practical casuistry makes no claims to infallibility. The Church's voice is not confused with the voice of the Church's Lord, though it is recognized that the free Lord can and does speak through the Church's witness. Because of the belief in the freedom of God, Christians can offer only advice, not absolute imperatives. A practical casuistry is simply the effort of one Christian to witness to another concerning what he believes should be the concrete shape of the Christian life. The task assumes the effort to be responsive to past revelation, but it also

assumes that there is no legally binding biblical hermeneutic that can infallibly establish the present meaning of biblical moral revelation.

Another consequence of the trinitarian understanding of God, the Barthian understanding of the Word, and the other convictions we have mentioned is that there is seen to be no single way to deal with all biblical moral injunctions. A wide spectrum of givenness is attached to various biblical commands, because the Holy Spirit is free to attach Himself in various ways to past moral revelation. In some cases Ellul and Barth regard the possibility of God taking exception to His past commands to be very remote. In these cases they speak of the law as a lower limit. Though the Christian life is to exceed such structural guidelines, it is not to fall below them and they are seen as relatively firm.[1] Though a biblical commandment becomes authoritative only when by God's grace it becomes God's personal command, there can be an ongoing givenness to the command in a person's life, once it has been established in this way. There is a structural side to the Christian life which is not a mere function of momentary inspiration. Ellul is especially concerned that Christians not use their freedom as an excuse for not being radically faithful to God, as an excuse for choosing an easier life than life under the law. (This is a major motive in his insistence on the law as a lower limit.) Christians are called to a righteousness which exceeds that of the law, without totally abolishing the demands of the law.

In other cases past commands are understood more as provocative illustrations, as points of departure, rather than as tangible givens.

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1. Exegetical support can be established with reference to Pauline theology. Though Paul used the law to give shape to the Christian life, he did not see it as establishing an exhaustive statement of God's expectations. Likewise, in the synoptic gospels the command to love issues in specific structural guidelines, but those guidelines do not exhaustively describe the meaning of love.

Here biblical commandments are thought of as instructionally necessary, rather than as relatively firm guidelines. In this mode, the Bible is used as a source of analogies or as establishing the general direction of God's commanding activity. Our response is to be less that of imitation and more that of a creative obedience which listens for the particularizing Word of the Holy Spirit to our individual situation, taking God's past revelation into consideration.

Barth and Ellul believe that it is very unlikely that God is going to take exception to the teachings of the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount (Barth) or the Old Testament teaching concerning tithing (Ellul). Exceptions to such biblical injunctions are to be understood as real exceptions, the rarity of which must be stressed. When Barth talks about other biblical injunctions, such as Jesus's specific call to particular people, he emphasizes the instructional, rather than the legal nature of such teachings — and Ellul agrees with his general point.

The practice of attributing varying degrees of givenness to various biblical moral teachings is the expression of the conviction that the Word of God is related to the content of Scripture in varying ways (this belief itself being the expression of a trinitarian understanding). The Holy Spirit's relationship to past moral revelation is not standardized. This being the case, Christian ethicists cannot avoid the problem of subjectivity (though true subjectivity is not autonomy — but the effort to be obedient to the living God). The task of Christian ethics is very much a spiritual one. Obedience is involved in the selection of biblical moral commands which are believed still to embody God's claim for today. (Barth's and Ellul's ethical theory recognizes the diversity present in various biblical moralities.) Obedience is also involved in seeking to distinguish between those commands which are relatively firm and those of a more relative (though equally important) nature.

The Christian ethicist is himself a witness to the Word which he believes that he has heard. He can only invite others to consider what he has heard and to test it by their own openness to the living God who speaks today as we attempt to study His revelation in the past. Barth and Ellul have offered a modest practical casuistry for Christian consideration. More than this is not claimed for their work.

Chapter V. The Purpose of the Christian Life: Faithful Witness to Jesus Christ

As with many other Christians, Ellul defines the purpose of Christian life as that of witnessing to Jesus Christ. He expands this definition by insisting that proclamation occurs in both words and deeds, and goes even further by saying that Christian verbal witness becomes credible only to the extent that Christian behaviour is consistent with the Gospel proclaimed. The Christian's unique task in everything that he does is to be a missionary who introduces that which is specifically Christian into the life of the world. Ellul's understanding has the effect of simplifying the Christian life to a remarkable degree. Amid every activity in which Christians engage, they are called to accomplish one thing and one thing only and to do so with methods consistent with the goal sought.

Ellul recognizes that Christian witness can extend to the social realm and in an indirect way sometimes can influence the world at various points. However, he rejects the idea that the Christian ethic can be applied to the world. The Christian ethic is inapplicable to the world because the Christian life is itself the expression of faith in Christ. The consequences of faith cannot be expected of or imposed upon those who do not share the faith. He believes that it would be a secular distortion of biblical law to attempt to apply it in isolation from an acceptance of the Gospel of God's guiding presence. He believes that

Christian "values" are themselves dependent upon the personal activity of the Commander who speaks His law in the context of revealing His presence. The basic God-centredness of his ethic prevents him from being able to offer a Christian "social ethic" to the world.

Ellul's specific examples of Christian social witness show that though Christians manifesting a uniquely Christian position may sometimes agree with non-believers at the level of concrete action, they will often find themselves all alone. For example, his advocacy of racial integration will meet with wide support from many humanitarians, but the specific proposals he makes concerning Christian involvement on behalf of the poor are unlikely to meet with favourable response from non-believers. He is not attempting to apply Christianity to the social order. For example he speaks of the inapplicability of the Gospel to the secular legal realm. (A frequent theme in his ethic is precisely this duality between the Church and the world.)

Since Ellul does not attempt to apply the Christian Gospel to the non-believing world, it comes as no surprise that he does not relate his Christian ethic to the hope of the moral improvement of the world. He explicitly rejects the doctrine of general moral progress in history as being inconsistent with the biblical view of man as radically sinful and as inconsistent with the New Testament understanding that history ends in judgment and does not gradually evolve toward the Kingdom of God. He believes that the immoral results of sin are so immense as to rule out speculation about general moral progress in history. (He admits that in each generation there may be moral gains at particular points which are offset by losses at other points. It's just that he does not believe in any general growth of good in history.) Ellul is surely of one mind with early Christianity here, since the New Testament established the motivational basis of the Christian life on a foundation which was not disturbed by the belief that history would soon end in judgment.

Ellul sees the Christian task as that of making a faithful witness to Christ, which is itself freed from obsession about human results. Were the Christian ethic based on the hope of the improvement of society, Christians would be tempted to resort to the realistic methods necessary to procure such results, rather than being content to make a faithful witness, trusting the results into God's care.

Since we agree that the style of the Christian life is to be defined by the Christian Gospel and limited to methods consistent with that Gospel, we also agree with Ellul's rejection of world improvement as the goal of the Christian life. Though we are called to love our neighbours, we are asked to do so in Christian ways, not in the pragmatic ways necessary to attain certain social or political results. We also think that Ellul is not encouraging a defeatist attitude toward human works. Quite to the contrary, by brushing aside false hopes, he helps Christians to make an ethical witness even in very discouraging times. On his terms, the Christian has no right to give up moral effort, using the imperfectibility of the world as his excuse. No matter how difficult may be the world situation in which Christians live, the moral task of the Christian life continues — because it is not based on the hope of world improvement. A Christian ethic based decisively on the hope of moral progress in general history (as was the social gospel) is liable to have its very motivation destroyed when it confronts a history more tragic than hopeful.

Just as in Ellul's understanding eschatological hope leads Christians to be discontented with every existing society (because every social order falls short of the Kingdom of God), so his rejection of general moral progress in history encourages the same critical stance with reference to any society in which Christians might live. Christians must always be critical of any achieved state of affairs, because they represent a transcendent Kingdom in a world that continually rejects that Kingdom.

While agreeing that the motivational basis of the Christian life should have nothing to do with the hope of human progress in any sense and while agreeing that Ellul's rejection of the doctrine of general moral progress is well founded, we think at places he makes an untenable further assumption — that social progress is also impossible. He can be quoted against himself at this point, so our criticism only applies to that aspect of his thought where he utterly denies that there can be any social improvement of the technological society, the city, and the modern world. We think that such ruthless sociological pessimism is not necessitated by the denial of general moral progress. We believe that the utter bleakness of this sociological point of view is not necessitated by Ellul's theology. The Christian belief in sin does not imply the world's total incapacity for social and institutional improvement. Though the general moral direction of history does not basically change (moral improvements concerning particular issues being offset by moral losses at other points), we think that man can improve his external living situation and that such improvement is not without significance. We are not claiming that history as such is progressive, even in this social sense; we are only arguing that there can be widespread social improvement and that such a recognition is perfectly consistent with the belief in the fallenness of man.

Ellul goes on to describe the general shape of the Christian life which he believes is capable of witnessing to the Gospel. He thinks that such a way of life should include inward and outward humility, the abandonment of the quest for status and worldly success. We agree that Christians are not to seek self-aggrandisement and that this prohibition should have outward behavioural consequences. (We agree that this point can be biblically established with reference to the teachings of Jesus and Paul.) A life lived in faithfulness to Christ in a world that rejects Christ will surely bring one into a position of receiving less worldly

success than one otherwise would. If the way of Christ does not always conflict with the actions of the world, it surely conflicts at many points. We also appreciate the fact that Ellul does not appear to be offering a timeless legalistic formula as to what in individual cases constitutes this life of outward humility. He generally does not deny that Christians can keep influential leadership positions.

Ellul also believes that a life that is a faithful witness to Christ will include a great deal of suffering. (Christian humility involves a type of suffering, in that it brings about a diminution of worldly success.) The very task of witnessing to Christ itself brings suffering and persecution, because Christians, by virtue of their allegiance to the Kingdom of God, are forced to call into question many of the world's values. Such a transvaluation of values has the effect of calling the world to repentance, a call that the world resents. We agree with this point and agree that it can be substantiated on the basis of the New Testament witness.

Ellul's discussion of Christian love also indicates the shape of the Christian life which he bleieves is a faithful reflection of allegiance to Christ. We agree that Christian love is based on a participation in the Holy Spirit and thus is qualitatively different from natural love. We also agree that Christian love is sacrificial love and is most truly indicated in love for one's enemies (in response to God's love for undeserving sinners). Because we agree concerning the importance of an all-inclusive love, which includes even a love for enemies, we disagree with Ellul's tendency to privatize love, his tendency to confine love to the personal sphere. We believe that to limit love's scope in this way is to contradict the insight that Christians are to love even their enemies. How can Christians love all enemies, if their expression of love is to be limited to those people near at hand? We agree that Christian love must include personal acts

of love; we cannot agree that these are the only avenues of expression open to Christians. We think that to argue that Christian love cannot possibly inspire participation in society's programmes and institutions is to distort the biblical teaching by superimposing a personalistic philosophy on the Bible. We do not agree that the Bible articulates an ontology of love which limits love to the personal sphere. In particular, we do not think that the parable of the Good Samaritan makes this point, though Ellul is confident that it does. That parable seems to us to reject any limiting definition as to who is or is not a Christian's neighbour. Instead of advocating limiting definitions as to who is one's neighbour, the parable talks about being a neighbour to those in need. We see no reason why the category of neighbours in need should not include distant neighbours, whom we cannot possibly know personally, but whom we nevertheless are called to love.

Chapter VI. Christ's Lordship over a Rebellious World

We have seen that Ellul understands the Christian life in eschatological perspective. The Christian is to be in the world, but not of the world. His understanding of the sovereignty of God is consistent with this point of view. Believing in the hidden sovereignty of Christ, he insists that Christ's intentional will cannot be perceived simply by looking at external events and conforming to what is happening. God's will is not a function of history as such, but is the expression of God's own freedom and purpose. Though in a hidden way Christ is absolutely sovereign in and through the evil which He permits, Christian obedience is never a mere conformity to the world. This cannot be the case because the world over which Christ reigns is a sinful one, whose actions are often not in conformity with Christ's

intentions.[1] The fact that God can use evil to accomplish His benevolent purposes is not to be used as an excuse for Christians to sin by conforming to the sinful ways of the world. The way of Christian obedience involves the conscious effort to seek God's intentional will and to be obedient to that, even though so doing often sets one at odds with one's environment. By recognizing the reality of sin and also God's creative ability to accomplish His purposes in the midst of sin, Ellul encourages Christians to strive to lead lives freed from the sinful ways of the world, while at the same time encouraging them to trust in God's hidden wisdom.

A modest criticism we have had is that Ellul's thought at this point is so polemically determined by his disagreement with those who advocate conformity to the world, that he seems to stress only the critical insight implied in the Christian belief in providence. We agree that the Christian belief in providence does not imply an endorsement of all that happens. Christians are not pantheists and a critical attitude toward public events is not inconsistent with faith in the Lordship of Christ, but is implied by the knowledge that Christ rules over a rebellious world. We think, however, that Ellul could have said more about the fact that God does do positive things in public or external history. If God's positive actions in public history are not self-evident, neither are they negligible. Thus the Christian mood need not be one-sidedly critical; it must also involve gratitude for the ways in which God brings together external factors to contribute toward the Christian perception of His will. What God demands of a man has some relationship to the external factors in which God the Creator and Lord has allowed a man's life to be placed. If God's will cannot be read off from a knowledge of external factors, neither can it

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1. We agree that when the Bible talks about God's sovereignty it does not forget what it has already said about human sinfulness. We also agree that the Bible sees God as a free agent and not as a mere structure of history.

be perceived if careful attention is not paid to such factors as one's particular gifts and limitations, one's external opportunities and the lack thereof, etc. We doubt whether Ellul would disagree concerning the positive attitude we have been discussing which is implied in the Christian belief in providence. (We have attempted to make it clear that such an attitude must not involve a conformity to the factors of one's environment, only the effort to listen for the Word as it relates to these factors.) It's just that he himself has not developed this aspect to any great extent and, having failed to do so, he could easily give a one-sidedly negative impression of the Christian attitude implied by the belief in the sovereignty of Christ.

The real problem in Ellul's thought concerning the sovereignty of Christ is where he flirts with the apocalyptic category of history becoming more degenerate as a result of Christ's resurrection. We regard his thought at this point as entirely unstable and self-contradictory. At some places he contradicts this point by saying that history has always been marked by the signs which New Testament apocalyptic passages attribute to the time following the resurrection. At other places he contradicts his point by implying that if history has gotten worse at any one time, it has been in the modern period, not immediately following Christ's resurrection. Along these later lines, he argues that a unique characteristic of the present period is the relative absence of the Spirit; but then he seemingly contradicts himself by saying that the period following Christ's resurrection is marked by a more active presence of the Spirit.

With all these contradictions one seriously doubts whether this aspect of Ellul's thought is of much importance. Were it of importance, he would surely have attempted to sort out his thinking better than he has done. Of his various formulations, we agree with the idea that public history has always been marked by the same signs of evil, though

we agree that Christ's resurrection did bring about a fuller manifestation of the Spirit to the Church (which did not itself change the general shape of public history). We do not agree that Christ's resurrection called forth a fuller expression of evil. We can understand that the New Testament authors who saw Christ's resurrection as the inauguration of the eschaton could put the issue in this way, but we fail to see how it can be so put with the endurance of history for these many centuries. Also, if this point is really true, it should be capable of historical verification. If world history suddenly became worse as a result of Christ's resurrection, then secular historians should be able to see signs of this. We are aware of no empirical verification of this point and we do not believe that it can be sustained theologically in the absence of such verification.

Chapter VII. The Christian Life and the Political Order

Ellul argues on both theological and sociological grounds that the state has the inevitable tendency to make a religion of itself. He thinks that the modern form of this tendency is the continuing growth of centralized states, which justify their omnicompetence on the grounds that the important problems in life are all political and are capable of political solution. Politization is Ellul's name for the tendency to accept this state of affairs. Just as politization in the world involves the sacralizing of political affairs and the assumption that all true history is political, in the Church politization takes the form of the identification of highly debatable and relative political choices with the truth of the Gospel.

Over against this politicizing tendency, Ellul appeals to the Bible as establishing the relativity of politics. He argues that though the state preserves a relative order and justice, which permit

the freedoms necessary for the Gospel to be preached, he says that the Bible sees the state as incapable of establishing true meaning for life. He insists that by biblical standards the state should be regarded as a limited thing, having nothing direct to do with the establishment of the good revealed by God. This being the case, he insists that politics is not an area of sacred truth, as it is currently made out to be. He opposes the omnicompetent state because he believes that the Gospel and it alone offers true meaning for life.

Relating his theological insight concerning the relativity of politics to his sociological observations, he argues that not only is the state incapable of providing "solutions" to life's major problems, but he says that it is incapable of providing "solutions" of any sort. He believes that true political problems are by their very nature always incapable of solution. At best all that political decisions can offer is a tolerable balance between various conflicting claims.

We agree that the state should be understood as <u>indirectly</u> related to salvation, in the way just suggested. If God's purpose is revealed in Christ and is covenant fellowship, then surely God's purpose in creation and in providence is related. Specifically, we believe that the state does not just preserve order, but unbeknownst to itself is used by God to permit the preaching of the Gospel.

Concerning a theology of the state, we also agree in general with Ellul that to some extent the demonic has invaded every state. This being the case, all states are to be relativized and Christians are to adopt critical (though also appreciative) attitudes toward all states. We disagree, however, with Ellul's acceptance of Barth's and Cullmann's exegesis concerning Rom. 13. We do not think that an implied reference to angelic powers can be assumed to be present when Rom. 13 refers to political "authorities". We think that there are much more convincing

theological ways of establishing the truth of the moral ambiguity of government than resting one's case on ingenious exegetical speculation, admittedly incapable of proof (so admitted by Cullmann). One can establish the same theological point by setting Rom. 13 in polar tension with Rev. 13 or in tension with the Old Testament prophetic tradition. By making the point in this way in the broader context of the canon, one's theological convictions seem to rest on surer biblical grounds than if one attempts to wring more theological meaning out of Rom. 13 than it seems to contain.

Ellul has an array of additional biblical arguments (two of which we will briefly mention here) which leads him to his conclusion concerning the relativity of politics and the state. For example, he says that Jesus Christ was not politically involved and this being so, political involvement cannot be said to be an imperative of faith. (Ellul is not denying that as an act of freedom a Christian may choose to become active in politics.) To put his point our way: if Jesus Christ were the true man and as such were non-political, how can political participation be imperative, as politicized Christians claim it is? He also argues that there is no legitimate way to use the Bible to establish the timeless preferability of one particular form of the state. This being the case, politicized Christians, who use the Bible to defend the timeless preferability of the form of the state they favour, do a disservice to the Bible and confuse their human preferences with what can be said as a clear aspect of Christian truth.

Ellul is quite frank in recognizing that revelation declares the whole area of politics as relative. A characteristic conclusion he reaches is that "all points of view have their motives of justice and their burdens of injustice".[1] He thinks that no matter what political

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1. False Presence, p. 151.

decision is taken, it generally involves guilt, this being so because political decisions seldom offer Christian choices or even choices the Christian preferability of which can be clearly established. He thinks that legitimate Christian considerations are often both represented and denied by the various sides (though of course some sides may not represent any Christian considerations). Against political Christians, he insists that the Christian preferability of day-in-and-day-out political choices is seldom obvious, though he admits that occasionally the Church as Church can and must stand on one side of a political issue (for example, at Barmen). Though individual Christians can have their own political opinions and can even have their own opinions as to what is relatively preferable from the Christian perspective, he thinks that Christians should be very reluctant to identify one side of complex and debatable political issues with true doctrine. He has no objections to Christian discussion of political issues; in fact, political discussion, rather than the preaching of political stances, is what he advocates.[1]

If Christians feel called to participate in direct political channels, he thinks that the main contribution they can make stems in large part from their recognition of the relativity of political affairs and their awareness of the otherness of Christianity in relation to <u>all</u> political options. Recognizing the common allegiance that Christians of even diverse political viewpoints should have (an allegiance due to the Christocentric focus of the faith), Christians can help calm political passions and can introduce cool rationality into heated political

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1. We think Ellul is inconsistent when he says that the laity has the right to discuss political issues, but then vocationally excludes the clergy from the same discussions. We also think he is inconsistent in arguing that laymen may participate in political parties, but that clergymen must not. Since all Christians are, according to him, to seek to express a reconciling presence in the world, why must the style of this presence be so totally different between clergy and laity?

rhetoric. Being free of ideological bondage and partisan points of view, Christians can help those in their own political groups to try to take account of the legitimate criticisms that others of other points of view are raising. Whether such a one-sidedly critical presence within political groups can be called true political participation or not, it may nevertheless be a significant activity and one made possible in part by the Christian recognition of the relativity of politics.

Looking back over what we have said here concerning politization and the relativity of politics, we agree that there is much misguided enthusiasm for politics in the world and in the Church, enthusiasm which borders on a sacralizing of political decisions and political affairs in general. Even if the Church is not politicized to the extent that Ellul imagines and even if the pietist problem (escapism from service to Christ in the world) lingers on more than he suspects, we still think that he has put his finger on an area where the world has invaded and influenced the Church to the detriment of her own faith. We think that he is correct that only rarely can political decisions legitimately be identified with the Christian position. We also think that what he says about the relativity of politics could greatly contribute to a more loving and tolerant spirit of political discussion among Christians. His thought could have the effect of helping to lower the temperature of Christian political discussion — and this contribution alone would be monumental!

Not only does Ellul affirm the relativity of politics; he also affirms the autonomy of politics in relationship to Christian values and sometimes he affirms the same in relationship to human values. Arguing on the basis of both biblical and sociological insights, he insists that political affairs are incapable of being influenced by Christian values. He even says that the effort to apply Christian values to the secular

political realm has disastrous consequences. Christians are blinded to the actual reality of the state and states are led to commit acts of worldly imprudence, giving their enemies unfair advantage. His conclusion is that the state does a better job if it bases its policies on human realism, rather than on the futile effort to apply Christian truth.

We agree that the Christian ethic is inapplicable to non-Christians and to the secular state in particular. However, we do not agree that politics is autonomous with reference to human values. Politics being one aspect of human affairs, it must surely be the expression of human morality. Though the human values represented by politics may often need to be criticized by Christians and though they will always fall short of Christian ideals, nevertheless we think that there is no such thing as a state devoid of human values of one sort or another. Ellul himself is not able consistently to sustain this point of view, which is as abstract as his tendency to isolate technology from human goals and purposes.

Granted Ellul's verdict concerning the autonomous nature of politics (a verdict we share as far as Christian values are concerned), and granted his perfectionistic understanding of the Christian life, one can see that on his terms it is very difficult for Christians to be politicians in the usual sense of the word. Because of the autonomous nature of politics, politicians are to be decisively concerned to weigh probable consequences and to make decisions on the basis of prudent realism. Christians, on the other hand, are to be decisively concerned about the purity of the means used, trusting the results into God's keeping. Since Christians are to witness to Christ with means consistent with Christ and since it is seen as disastrous to attempt to apply Christianity to political affairs, the Christian who chooses to be a politician is faced with the inescapable dilemma of having his political

vocation at odds with his Christian vocation (which for Ellul includes the whole of life). Since Ellul will not qualify either his social or his political realism or his Christian perfectionism, he has to admit the existence of this dilemma for those who choose to be politicians in the normal sense of the word. Because of his aversion to legalism, he does not flatly reject this option, but seeing the dilemma that it poses for Christians, he encourages other modes of response. These other ways of relating to political affairs enable Christians to make contributions to politics without having to deny the perfectionism of their witness.

When one thinks about the actual substance of Ellul's suggestions for Christians who choose to be involved in direct political channels, one realizes that what he usually is referring to is very different from political participation in the standard sense of the word. Rather than participating normally in politics, Christians are encouraged to preach Christ to those who do participate (at least to preach Christ in the sense of introducing Christian transcendence at points where it is little expected). By witnessing to divergent points of view and by pointing to the importance of pure means, Christians within political groupings critically qualify political affairs, without themselves being in bondage to the ideology of their group and without putting a major emphasis on seeking to get candidates elected or issues passed. Though he holds open such an approach as a genuine Christian option, he himself has reasons for preferring even more indirect forms of witness.

From Ellul's sociological analysis he has come to ruthlessly pessimistic conclusions concerning the inability of democratic citizens to control the state or to participate effectively in politics. We think that he may have overstated the degree to which democracy has become an illusion, the extent to which democratic citizens cannot

control the state or effectively participate in politics. However, what is important for our considerations is that his political disillusionment and cynicism concerning direct political participation directly relates to his personal preference for forms of political witness of totally indirect sorts. If one thinks that very little can be accomplished through direct political channels, indirect channels become all the more attractive.

Another reason why Ellul prefers indirect approaches is that he is convinced that politics is not a very opportune place to make a witness for Christ. He thinks that when political activists are directly involved in political affairs they are very inattentive to Christian preaching. Though this insight does not negate the possibility of attempting to make a Christian witness in political affairs, neither does it encourage such activities.

The totally indirect proposals Ellul discusses are means whereby Christians could influence political reality without any direct political participation. In order to make this witness, groups would have to become more autonomous over against the state, working to define their own values. Having established this autonomy (which he proposes for Christian and non-Christian groups), Christians in particular could become good political critics (rather than politicians). Possessing a transcendent reference point (the future Kingdom revealed in Christ), they could criticize the sociological and psychological assumptions accepted by most people and employed by political propagandists. By criticizing these commonplace assumptions, Christians would help their fellow-citizens to become more critical of the state, and when citizens become more critical the totalitarian omnicompetence of the modern state is threatened. (Even the establishment of autonomous groups is a blow against the totalitarian state.) In addition, by studying political reality, Christians might be able to issue early prophetic warnings concerning

particular political situations; the state might then be able to establish a degree of justice and human disaster might be avoided. Last of all, Christians could personally converse with those in positions of authority, and in this personal and non-political way help the poor and the oppressed.

Ellul's discussion of possible Christian responses to politics opens up a vast spectrum of political possibilities. Though he seems to favour the totally indirect forms of witness, he does not rule out the other possibilities. He has made a good case for more indirect forms of political witness, which can be undertaken with less necessity for Christian compromise and which actually take advantage of uniquely Christian convictions. (For example, the Christian's eschatological distancing from all political options could help him to be a more objective critic of political affairs.) However, though he sees the difficult situation facing Christians who choose to be involved in direct political activity in the usual sense of the word, he does not deny that some Christians may be called to that agonizing situation. Neither should we deny this possibility. Noting the advantages and disadvantages of the various Christian options in relationship to politics, each Christian must seek that response which seems most faithful in his own circumstances.

Chapter VIII. The Christian Understanding of Money

In keeping with the teaching of Jesus, Ellul sees the seductive power of money, the attractive influence it exerts over all men. He thinks that man's natural relationship to the material world is one of bondage to the things that money can buy. As a part of the meaning of human bondage to sin, natural man is in captivity to a false understanding of life which puts monetary accumulation, rather than God, at the centre.

Ellul believes that a major aspect of the meaning of Christ's work as Saviour is that He delivers Christians from this false understanding of

life. Instead of being in captivity to the power of money, Christ enables Christians to use the material world for the glory of God and the service of man. Though he affirms no timeless legalistic formula as to what constitutes the dividing line between need and excess, he says that Christians are to divest themselves of all money and material possessions which exceed that of need. Instead of luxurious over-consumption, Christians are to give their wealth away to help the poor. In so doing, Christians are not only performing the stewardship function which is a part of their Christian calling; they are also acting to free themselves from bondage to "mammon".

Ellul believes that the Christian detachment from money is not merely a matter of disposition, but must express itself in outward practice. "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Mtt. 6:21). If one does not love money (I Tim. 6:10), then one should not devote one's life to monetary accumulation. If one bases one's outward life on the quest for material abundance, this, for Ellul, is evidence that one's inner loyalty is <u>in fact</u> misdirected.

There is a great deal to be said for Ellul's understanding of the Christian's relationship to money. In line with the teachings of Jesus, he rightly recognizes the threat that money poses to the human soul. He knows that affluence is a problem for Christian existence and that the Christian issue concerning money is not simply that of stewardship (though it is also that). He also recognizes that the danger of wealth is not simply that of having, but also that of wanting to have. Physically poor people <u>can be</u> in bondage to a materialistic value system, as <u>are</u> the physically rich. Though true Christian being expresses itself both in not having an excess of material things and in not wanting to have, non-Christian being can be present even when one is not rich, but when one directs one's energies toward that goal. Ellul's position also has the merit that it avoids legalism. His distinction between need and

excess will not itself tell individuals in diverse cultural and economic situations what does or does not constitute a life devoid of luxury, but by pointing to the distinction he does help Christians to approach the problem of consumption in the proper spirit. A further merit of his stance is that while trying to help Christians to recover styles of life which are appropriate responses to the Gospel, he is not saying that an absence of abundance is a prerequisite for the receipt of grace. He is not encouraging the Church to preach only to the poor, but is saying that the Church's preaching to all men should include an indication of the way of life which is a faithful response to the Gospel.

We believe that what Ellul has to say concerning the Christian attitude toward money could be of immense help to the modern Church, especially to the Church living in the superabundance of the West. What he says could help the Church of the West to gain a Christian identity over against the affluent society in which she lives.

Chapter IX. The Christian Understanding of Violence

Ellul begins his discussion of violence with a statement of what he regards as Christian realism concerning violence. Concerning both the facts of violence and the consequences of violence, we have been critical of many of his formulations, not because we regard his views as simply wrong, but because we think that the statements often go further than the biblical and sociological evidence seems to permit.

We agree that violence is an order of necessity, a necessary and common aspect of the fallen world. The fact of sin surely implies the fact of violence and we agree that this can be biblically shown and sociologically confirmed. We also agree that states are established by violence and at least in part are maintained by the same. We think that Ellul overstates his case when he describes violence as the sole means available to those in places of political power. We see neither

biblical nor sociological evidence for this sweeping extension of the argument. Likewise, we think that he overstates the degree to which the world as a whole is ruled by violence. While agreeing that economic and class relations involve a great deal of violence, we disagree that such relations are nothing but violence. We do not believe that his general theology necessitates these sweeping statements. Since he recognizes that Christians and non-Christians can sometimes agree at the level of concrete action, he has no vested interest in proving that all non-Christian actions are objectively contrary to God's intention. His general theology does not necessitate the simplistic view that non-Christian relations involve nothing but violence. Such a view is really consistent only with a doctrine of man's total moral depravity, which Ellul is not willing to affirm.

Having stated what he regards as the facts of violence, he goes on to describe what he regards as the consequences of violence. He calls these consequences "laws of violence". The first one he discusses is that of "sameness". We agree that subtle forms of violence can be as violent as more overt forms and thus are essentially similar. We disagree, however, that Christians are to make no distinctions between various types of physical violence, totally rejecting the legitimacy of any distinction between legitimate force and illegitimate violence. We believe that Ellul makes an exegetical mistake in his assumption that Mtt. 5:21-22 is a statement about the sameness of violence in the social and political order. "'You have heard that it was said to men of old, "You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment ...'" We think that this passage does not refer to the social order at all, but is a normative statement of what Matthew understood as a requirement of Jesus for Christians. Not only does this passage seem incapable of establishing the sameness between force and violence, but we

think that Rom. 13 and parallel passages imply the legitimacy of some such distinction. When Christians consider the issue of physical violence in society (as contrasted with the question of the Christian recourse to violence), they seem biblically justified in arguing that some forms of violence are justified, because of the end sought. If the police use violence for the sake of protecting society from criminal violence (and are not doing so with unnecessary violence), we think that their violence is legitimate and falls under the category of justifiable force.

Another law of violence ("continuity") has to do with the establishment of the habit of violence. While agreeing that the habit of violence is not easily broken, we think that Ellul overstates his case at those points where he seems to say that the habit cannot be broken at all. However, we are not sure whether he really intends for us to take such sweeping statements literally.

A further law of violence (formulated rather confusingly) has to do with the issue of whether violence can be instrumental in the creation of a relatively more just political order. Not only does violence provoke counter-violence, but the habit of violence once learned is so hard to set aside that revolutionaries do not make good statesmen. This being so, the immediate result of violent revolution can never involve an improvement over the order against which the revolution was fought. We see truth in this argument, as long as it is not extended to affirm that the <u>eventual</u> result of violent revolution can never involve an improved political situation. This extension of the argument seems insupportable for the simple reason that all states have come into existence by violence, but some seem to be relatively better than their predecessors. Some of Ellul's words do seem to imply this extension of the argument and we are not entirely sure whether his words can be legitimately de-literalized or whether they must be criticized. On balance, we favour a de-literalization

at this point, but we think that his exact intention cannot be finally established.

The last two laws of violence can be easily stated. One is called the law of "reciprocity". The point here is that violence provokes hatred, which in turn provokes counter-violence, which then leads to a further escalation of violence. This being the case, the only sure and certain result of violence is the provocation of more violence. The last law of violence states that the practitioners of violence, recognizing the detestable nature of violence, always attempt to hide the true nature of violence from themselves and from others. They do so by seeking to justify violence in the name of noble purposes.

Having established a realistic attitude toward violence, Ellul goes on to state his Christian response and to do so by appealing to normative biblical considerations. At some points he simply refers to Christ as the Saviour who delivers Christians from the violent order of necessity (the implicit assumption being that violence is a sinful expression of man's fallen condition). Not only does he believe that Christians are enabled by Christ to rebel against the violent order of necessity, he also believes that the failure to do so is due to conformity to the world and the failure to discern the uniquely Christian form of action. (Thus both his eschatological reasoning and his perfectionism come to expression.)

Ellul's understanding of violence is also the expression of his biblical conviction concerning the duality between the Church and the world, his belief that Christian obedience is impossible for a non-Christian world. Since Christians cannot expect others to act as though they were Christian, he believes that the way of non-violence is not to be expected or required of non-believers. He does recognize, however, that the Christian life of peace and the Christian criticism of all violence can have an indirect effect on society. Without being able

fundamentally to alter the world's violence, the Church can moderate the warring tendency of nations and can do so by attacking the easy conscience of a regime's supporters. The Church can influence public opinion, which in turn can influence a nation's war policies.

Ellul absolutely rejects the legitimacy of Christian recourse to violence and does so by appealing to the teachings of Jesus and Jesus's non-violent example. He does not claim that the Bible offers a consistent teaching on violence and war, but he nevertheless confesses that aspect of biblical tradition which has claimed his allegiance. (A Barthian doctrine of Scripture can be seen to be at work here.)

Though Ellul rejects the legitimacy of Christian recourse to violence, he is even more adamant in his rejection of the use of Christianity to justify violence. He believes that only human (not Christian) reasons can be found to justify violence. Even if for human reasons Christians feel compelled to participate in violence, they must not attempt to use Christianity to justify their conduct. Rather, they should confess their sin even in the act of sinning and seek forgiveness. Since he sees violence as always and in all circumstances of the sinful order of necessity, he will never give it a Christian defence. Because he will not use Christianity to justify violence, he rejects all just war theories.

Granted the nature of modern warfare, we agree that it is misguided to attempt to use Christianity to justify war. However, we believe that legitimate police action, conducted with a degree of restraint and for defensible purposes, can be justified on Christian grounds. (This is not to say that Christians themselves can be involved in such use of force.)

One significant advantage of Ellul's advocacy of Christian non-violence, as compared with "pacifists" in general, is that his position is free from self-righteousness. He is intensely aware that the

advocates of non-violence (himself included) are not free from the guilt stemming from their refusal to offer violent defence on behalf of the victims of violence. However, he does believe that those who resort to violence also have a great deal of guilt on their hands and thus have no reason to become self-righteous about their virtue!

A deeper problem in Ellul's thought concerning violence is that it may not be easy in a democracy to distinguish between the verbal defence of violence for the state or for revolutionary groups and one's own physical recourse to violence. Because of his advocacy of social and political realism, he is not non-violent when it comes to his attitude toward violence on the part of the state or on the part of revolutionaries. In many cases he would seem to be in the situation of verbally defending the necessity of violence by these groups. Since such verbal defence of violence contributes to acts of violence, it is hard to separate it from the direct act of killing, in which he says Christians must not engage. On his terms there is no way out of this dilemma. He genuinely believes that the action of the state must be guided by a realism offensive to Christians; he also believes that Christians should not engage in conduct contrary to the Gospel of love. This problem is simply the expression of a central feature of Ellul's ethic — the duality between the Church and the world.

The Ingredients of Ellul's Christian Ethic

All that remains to be done is to mention a few general conclusions which become apparent when one looks back over the broad sweep of Ellul's ethical thought. These remarks relate to the way he does Christian ethics.

It is interesting how central Scripture is for Ellul's approach to ethics. To discuss the meaning of Christian ethics with him is to enter a conversation about the meaning of the Bible for today. We agree with

his emphasis on the importance of the Bible for ethics. Such an approach is a welcome relief from the tendency of many Christian ethicists (especially in America!) to do ethics on the basis of philosophical assumptions or pragmatic assumptions of culture. It seems to us almost incredible that so many Protestant ethicists use Scripture so little. (This may be due in part to the uniquely modern tendency for various theological departments to become isolated from one another — almost as though one field of Christian understanding had no relationship to others. Over-specialization has had its casualties in theology, as in other areas of life.)

Not only do we agree with Ellul's emphasis on the importance of Scripture for ethics, we also agree with his procedure of attempting to listen to the witness of the whole canon. What one learns at one place in Scripture must surely be understood in conversation with what one learns elsewhere. We also agree with the effort to make a theological expansion of the text, seeking the broader meaning of the Word for our time. We do not agree with those who claim that the original historical meaning of a text of Scripture should be regarded as its sole meaning.

While not disagreeing at the level of basic principles, at several places we have had to criticize Ellul's actual practice of biblical interpretation. The common denominator of all of our criticisms has been a conviction that at several places he seems so anxious to state the modern meaning of the Word that he fails to do adequate historical homework concerning the probable original meaning of the text. For example, we think that his ontology of the city was constructed by the practice of continually avoiding the original meaning of various biblical teachings, which we think were not intended to refer to the city. We believe that on this issue he simply read his modern sociological viewpoint into Scripture.

Likewise, we think that his exegesis of the parable of the Good Samaritan was more of an eisegesis for his own personalistic assumptions, rather than an actual exegesis of the text. On violence, we believe that concerning both the nature and consequences of violence, he sometimes tended to extend biblical teachings further than they will legitimately go. When he talks of the law of "sameness", we think he misapplies Jesus' teaching on the sameness of anger and murder, by seeing it as referring to society at large. These are examples of points where we have had reason to criticize his exegetical methods. In all cases we have criticized because we have thought that he has not done justice to the original meaning. Ellul would surely agree in principle that any interpretation which ignores the original historical meaning is unlikely to be capable of providing the theologically expanded meaning for today.

We ought not to overstate the degree to which we disagree with Ellul's practice of biblical interpretation. In actual fact, we have agreed with his exegesis at far more points than we have disagreed. We are not intending to say that his practice of interpretation is usually faulty or even often so. We are simply criticizing him at those specific points where we feel his interpretation can be corrected by a more careful exegesis.

Not only are we grateful for the centrality of the Bible in Ellul's approach to ethics, we very much agree with his eclectic way of using other theologians at those points where he thinks they help in understanding the biblical faith. We entirely agree that the biblical Word must be normative. The insights of various theologians are to be used with discretion and the discretion required involves one's own effort to be faithful to the biblical Word. Theologians are but commentators on Scripture, no more and no less. Insofar and only insofar as their comments are biblically helpful are they of use to the Church. This is

surely a Reformation understanding of the role of Church tradition in relationship to the Bible and it is most decisively Jacques Ellul's view.

It seems to us fair to say that Ellul is more influenced by Barth than by any other theologian. What is interesting, however, is that he uses Barth only at those places where he finds him to be helpful. Ellul is no mere Barthian, one who rather worshipfully adores everything Barth has written. For example, when Barth soars off into ontological speculation, Ellul remains right on the ground and doesn't even seem to take notice. The speculative side of Barth's theology is entirely missing from Ellul's discussion.

What is especially interesting is that Ellul is willing to learn at particular points from those with whom he most severely disagrees at other points. For example, he utterly rejects Bultmann's demythologizing enterprise, but he recognizes that Bultmann is sometimes a very perceptive expositor, especially with reference to the ethical meaning of the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel. The Church has much to learn from Ellul's practice! All too often the Church refuses to listen to anything a particular theologian says, because she disagrees with him at some points. If one is a real student of the Bible (as Ellul is), one need not be defensive in this way. Since whatever theologians say can be compared with Scripture and one's own encounter with the Word speaking through Scripture, the Church can be free to learn what she can from all quarters, utilizing the unique contributions of various theologians at the very places where they are especially helpful.

Having spoken of Ellul's use of both Scripture and theological tradition, the other ingredient of his ethic is obviously sociology. He is very much a man whose thinking is of one piece. Though he has multiple insights relating to diverse fields, his insights all interrelate. It is not fair to say that the sole key to all of his thinking is theology; that would be to oversimplify and to forget that he is also a sociologist.

We do insist, however, that to isolate his sociology from his theology is to fail to understand even his sociology.[1] Since he writes theological counterpoints to his major sociological works, it is naive to believe that his sociology can be understood from the sociological context alone. We thus believe that radical students who read only Ellul's sociology (because they like his scathing critique of the modern world) are bound to misunderstand even that. We also believe that since his

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1. The fact that there are no major secondary sources on Ellul's theology perhaps contributes to this danger.

Because the secondary literature on his theology is so scarce, we have been assisted only modestly by what others have said concerning him. (The situation would be entirely different were we writing on his sociology.) The near absence of secondary literature related to our topic has meant that we have had to do our best on our own, learning directly from Ellul and learning from his theological teachers. Criticisms have come mainly either from our own direct encounter with his thought or from setting other theological points of view in conversation.

In the Katallagete: Be Reconciled issue later republished as Introducing Jacques Ellul there are occasional comments related to our theme. Also, there are a few other articles which touch on our topic. In various preceding footnotes we have evaluated these miscellaneous comments and criticisms. Often we have disagreed with the points made. For example, we had to disagree with Holloway's and Rose's contention that Ellul has flatly rejected the organized Church (see above, p. vi, n. 2). A related criticism had to do with Rose's view that Ellul is guilty of an all-out individualism (see above, p. 164, n. 4). We also said that Gabriel Vahanian somewhat confuses Ellul's thought when he credits him with believing that the chief characteristic of man is his "ability" to contest the way things are (see above, p. 56, n. 1). We believe that Ellul sees natural man as hopelessly incapable of making such contestation and that far from being a natural ability, he sees such a capacity as entirely a gift of grace. Vahanian may be aware of our point, but his statement itself does not show that he is. We also had a modest criticism of Richard Ray's view that Ellul bases prayer entirely on the command to pray, rather than on the receipt of grace (see above, p. 114, fn. from previous page). There seems to be an ambiguity in Ellul's thought at this point, but we disagree with Ray's flat assertion.

We agreed with Harvey Cox's criticism that war cannot legitimately be said to be a mere function of the city (above, p. 25). We were also in agreement with a statement by Vernard Eller. We agreed that Ellul's sociological criticism is really the reverse side of his eschatological hope; and also that his rather straightforward reading of the Bible (perhaps not always so straightforward) leads him to contend that the Christian life does not have to do with an interpretation of natural existence, but with new life. Most importantly, we agreed that Ellul is indeed a Christian prophet. (We saw no evidence for Eller's contention that Christoph Blumhardt has directly influenced Ellul: see above,

sociology is so radically pessimistic, it, by itself, can lead nowhere. Though some sociologists may believe that meaning in life can be found from within their sociology, Ellul is not one of these! In fact, Ellul leads one to the opposite dilemma. His sociological position leads to the brink of cynicism, hopelessness, and nihilism — unless one accepts the Gospel which extends from the other side. Though he has little hope to offer as a sociologist, he has much hope to offer as a Christian. We believe that not only is his sociology misunderstood if studied in isolation from his theology, but also that his sociology by itself is spiritually disastrous! He never intended that his sociology be read in isolation from his proclamation of the Gospel. If our work has shown nothing else, it has surely shown the centrality of a Christ-centred faith for Jacques Ellul.

In our work we have attempted to avoid the opposite danger of totally ignoring Ellul's sociology in preoccupation with his theology. To do so would have been to misunderstand the applied meaning of his theology. While recognizing that neither theme nor space allowed us to attempt to evaluate his sociological insights as such and his fascinating critique of the modern world, we have attempted to trace out and to evaluate the sociological corrolaries to all major theological ideas. Whenever his sociology has been directly related to the question "What ought Christians to do?" we have tried to pay close attention.

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p. 67, n. 3. We also agreed with Gabriel Vahanian's observation that Ellul is critical of theologians who interpret eschatology in the light of history, rather than history in the light of eschatology (see above, pp. 214-215).

In a somewhat different category from the above interpreters is William Stringfellow, a man who has been deeply influenced by Ellul. On the issue of human law, we believe that Stringfellow's position is essentially based on Ellul's thought and is a faithful reflection of it. Though Stringfellow's views did not help us to uncover any new insight about Ellul, it was interesting to see the thinking of a man directly influenced by him (see above, pp. 146(-148), n. 7).

. . .

We believe that the final word which must be said about Jacques Ellul is that no interpretation of his thinking can really capture the man and his elusive thought. Like the prophets of old, Jacques Ellul is very much an enigma and will always remain so. In spite of the imperfection of our interpretation and, we believe, any interpretation of this man's thought, we believe that we have come to know more about Christ and His ways by having sat at the feet of this most baffling, intriguing witness — Jacques Ellul.

APPENDIX

Appendix:

The Impossibility of a Christian Ethic

Ellul's eschatological understanding of the Christian life relates to his view that it is "impossible" to formulate a final and systematic Christian ethic. If the Christian life is a daily struggle of warfare against one's own sin and against our sinful bondage to the world, if the Christian life is a daily effort to perceive the transcendent will of God and place ourselves at the point where the world's opposition grows fierce, it is hard to see how this daily struggle can possibly be mapped out in a definitive way in advance. Agreeing with Bultmann's formulation that Christian life is life at "the end of the ages", Ellul concludes: "It is quite obviously impossible to construct the ethic of a life lived in terms of last things..."[1]

Ellul is aware that for an ethic to be applied on a wide scale its radicalism must be softened, and it must be adapted to man's capacities. He believes that this is the case even for Christian morality.[2] "Faced with the necessity of an incarnation of the faith, one feels the need to state the Christian truth in such a way that it can be lived. From that moment on we witness a theological effort which ends in heresy."[3] He, of course, is not opposed to seeking to incarnate Christian faith in life. What he does oppose is making this easier by softening the radical otherness of Christ's demands.

Because of Ellul's emphasis on the free guidance of the Holy Spirit, he has another reason for thinking that it is impossible to construct a

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 222.
2. Ibid., pp. 137-138.
3. Ibid., p. 89.

Christian ethic.[1] He agrees with Barth that ethics is not the science of God's will, but an openness to grace which continually calls man and his response into question.[2] If the Christian life has decisively to do with listening to God and seeking to be obedient to His personal will, then the Christian life has much less to do with theoretical morality than has often been assumed.[3]

At some points Ellul even seems to go too far in arguing for the relativity of biblical and post-biblical ethical formulations concerning the Christian life. We do not question that there is a degree of relativity to all formulations of the Christian life. We cannot agree, however, that past ethical formulations are entirely superseded. He says, "Because times change and conditions are never the same, the [ethical] works of the past can be of very little use to us."[4] He says of former statements of Christian ethics, "Their conclusions (if not their point of departure and their method) are thus entirely outmoded."[5] Surely ethical problems and solutions have more in common than Ellul's position here indicates. (Nor can what he says here be entirely reconciled with what he says elsewhere about the givenness of the law!) Neither can we agree that biblical ethical statements are so relativized while biblical dogmatic statements are to stand firm.[6] It would seem that the issue is more complex. There seem to be both dogmatic and ethical aspects of the biblical and post-biblical witness which are superseded and aspects which are not. Also, though it may be true that the Bible offers a clearer theology than ethic, it is really only a

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1. To Will and To Do, pp. 203-205, 213, 304.
2. Ibid., pp. 259, 305.
3. Ibid., pp. 215, 225ff., 299; Presence of the Kingdom, p. 20.
4. To Will and To Do, pp. 220-221.
5. Ibid., p. 225.
6. Ibid.

difference of degree and not of kind. Some biblical authors may even reverse the priorities. Paul may not present as complete an ethic as theology, but the authors of Matthew and James may present more complete ethical statements than theological statements.

Ellul at a few places even seems to imply that all efforts to formulate a Christian ethic are an act of unfaithfulness. "The closer the morality put together by man is to the will of God the more suspect it is, the more it is a proof of the absence of love on the part of that man, the more harshly it will be attacked by God."[1] The formulation of a Christian ethic may be a way of protecting ourselves against the free revelation of God, but it is surely uncharacteristic of Ellul's general approach to imply that it is necessarily so. He seems guilty of antinomianism when he writes, "He who lives in the covenant of his Lord by faith has no further need of these orders, of these prescriptions for the Christian life. He knows what he has to do. He knows where he is going."[2] "Every description [my underline] of Christian behavior is at once vain and sterile, and the pretention expressed therein is prejudicial to the freedom of God ..."[3] If these words truly represented his view, then both biblical morality and Ellul's books about the Christian life and all other such efforts are an affront to the freedom of God. At a few other places he uses language which borders on an outright devaluation of the task of Christian ethics.[4] These other words do not rule out the relative significance of Christian ethics, provided it does not seek to become a substitute for God's free activity. His flat rejection of ethical "systems"[5] may really mean closed systems, logical systems which

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 212.
2. Ibid., p. 218.
3. Ibid., p. 201.
4. Ibid., pp. 97, 202, 204, 305.
5. Ibid., p. 97.

hold open no significant place for God's free revelation. When he says that to define a Christian ethic is to "revolt against God,"[1] he may have in mind a system in the above sense. That this is his meaning is indicated in a following sentence where he implies that the task of Christian ethics can be made legitimate. "The only thing, then, that can make this quest legitimate, and can render it possible, is God's decision, which we cannot prejudge, and which we can only await in prayer and submission."[2] When he tells us that the covenant relationship "cannot be elaborated by us,"[3] he may not intend to minimize the importance of relative guidelines, but may be rejecting the sort of infallible claims made for human moralities which Reinhold Niebuhr so eloquently criticizes.[4]

What cannot be debated is that Ellul goes on to refer to the necessity of a Christian ethic and says several very positive things about the importance of biblical law. Despite a few contradictory formulations, it is clear that he does not wish to deny the importance of biblical moral teaching. His language of "impossibility" and "necessity" with reference to Christian ethics is thus overdrawn.[5] We must look at precisely what he says under these headings rather than imagining that he is doing nothing more than affirming a logical contradiction.

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1. To Will and To Do, p. 202; see also p. 204.
2. Ibid., p. 202.
3. Ibid., p. 305.
4. Ibid., p. 300. Søren Kierkegaard was very suspicious of both theological and ethical "systems". He thought that concern for ethical theory can easily become a substitute for ethical practice. He at one point virtually denied the significance of ethical theory (Kierkegaard, The Last Years, p. 247). Ellul indicates that he has read Kierkegaard's journals (Prayer and Modern Man, pp. 111, 139) and that he regards Kierkegaard as the one who alone can show us where to start today as Christians (Ellul, "Between Chaos and Paralysis," p. 749). He thus may be influenced by Kierkegaard in the rather careless language he uses at this point.
5. To Will and To Do, pp. 201ff., 245ff.

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I N D E X

SUBJECT INDEX

This index is intended mainly for the purpose of locating material not listed directly in the table of contents. However, we will list some subjects appearing in the table of contents so as to show various contexts in which the same subjects are dealt with.

Actualism, 51-52
Agreement at the level of concrete action, 35-41
Algeria, ix-x
Barmen complex, 259-260
Being, the priority of, 52-53
Bourgeoisie, 41 n.1, 337
Church,
  bourgeois nature of, 337
  relation to, vi(-viii), n.2
  listening to the world, 215-216
  politization of, 255-261
  use of propaganda, 91(f.) n.1
City,
  the sin of, 20-24
  the sins of, 24-26
  ontology of, 26-28
  agonistic existence with reference to, 77-83
  non-improvement of, 170-171
  application of apocalyptic thought to, 246-247
Conscience, 30-32
Conversion, 128, 217 n.1
Distant relationships, 198-206
Economic man, 322-323
Efficiency, 162-164, 176-177, 181-186
Freedom, Renaissance and Reformation understandings of, 270 n.3
God and Caesar, 266-267, 287-288
God's "yes" and "no", 155-156, 166 n.2
Hope, Christian and Marxist, 68(ff.) n.4
Human law,
  natural law, 146(ff.) n.7
  purpose of, 149-154
  relativity of, 151-152
  concrete human rights, 152-153
  double attitude toward, 276 n.3
Human morality,
  of the order of the fall, 28-32
  of the order of necessity, 32-35
Imitation of Christ, 189-191
Inapplicability of the Christian ethic to the world, 144-146, 148-149, 156-159
Individualism, 164(f.) n.4
Integration, 137, 291 n.2
Intentional-permissive will, 237-240
Justification-sanctification, law-Gospel, 42-47, 77-80
Just war theories, 295-298, 370-371
Laws of violence,
  sameness, 344-348, 360 fn.
  continuity, 348-349
  violence begets only violence, 350-352
  reciprocity, 352-353
  self-justification, 353-354
Lawyers, 140-141, 181-183
Man come of age, 65 fn., 253 n.2
Nationalism, 287-288
One Kingdom reasoning, 88-90, 175-176, 205, 266-267, 324-325, 357-358
Overconsumption, freedom from, 327-329
Perfectionism, 129
Poor,
  helping the really, 131 n.3, 138-143, 206-208
  identification with the, 327-328
  biblical definition of the 329-331
Progress, 157-159, 166-174, 244-249
Propaganda, 33 n.1, 91(f.) n.1
Relativizing the world, 72-77, 153-154, 290-291
Scripture, interpretation of, 26-28, 58 n.2, 84 n.3, 94-97, 109-110, 116-125, 144 n.2, 202-205, 320-321, 334-335, 340-341, 346-348, 352-353, 362-366, 417-419
Secular religion, 253-254
Secular state, 288-289
Secular theology, 64(f.) n.2, 68 n.3, 196-197, 217-219
Situation ethic, 108-109, 120-125
Slavery, 136-137
Solutions, myth of, 280-282

Sovereignty of God, 14-17, 127-128, 163-165, 176, 209-249, 270-272
Success, 181-186
Temporal election, 239-240
Theological training for laymen, 65-66
Theology of hope, difference from, 68(ff.) n.4
Theology of the Word (vs. theology of history), 209-230
Two Kingdom reasoning, 75(f.) n.2, 205, 299-300, 357-358
Universal salvation, 156 fn., 174 n.2
Violence, 25-26, 139-143, 147, 162 n.1, 165, 196-197, 222, 281-282, 290 n.3, 295-297, 302-303, 330(f.) n.5, 338-373
Work, 75(f.) n.2, 328-329